THE MUSLIM CONQUEST OF SPAIN

"Contents of the book are the writer's personal views and are not to be taken as official policy."

By the same author

The Sword of Allah
The Muslim Conquest of Persia
The Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa

THE MUSLIM CONQUEST OF SPAIN

by
Lieutenant General A.I. AKRAM

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to my son
MASOOD

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PREFACE

It had been my intention, when I started research in Muslim military history sixteen years ago, to write four books on the subject, starting with the earliest period of Islam – the time of the Prophet, on whom be peace. The series would end with the conquest of Spain. When I had done three books, viz *The Sword of Allah, The Muslim Conquest of Persia and The Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa*, and while the third one was with the printers, I was ready for Spain.

It was only when I began to read about the Muslims in Spain that I realised how unjust it would be to the history of Muslim arms to write only of the conquest of Spain and go no further. I read on with pleasure and astonishment, with pride and joy, about the great campaigns of the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. It was clear that one book would be totally inadequate to convey all that awaited the pen of a military writer. The military history of Muslim Spain demanded study and work of much larger dimensions, covering not only the conquest of the country by Musa bin Nusair and Tariq bin Ziyad but also the two and a half centuries of the Umayyad Emigrate, then the time of the petty kingdoms, the coming of the Berbers and the rule of the Murabiteen and Muwahhideen, and finally the tragic fall of Granada.

Such a work of research would require many years of labour and go into many volumes. But it would start with the conquest – a unique event in the history of Islam and the first glorious act in the exciting drama of Muslim Spain. This book

is a presentation of that event – the act performed on the stage of history by the finest fighting men of the time.

God in His infinite generosity looked with favour upon my endeavours. On retiring from the Army after a long and honourable career spanning thirty six years of war and peace, it was my good fortune to be appointed Pakistan's Ambassador to Spain. For this my thanks are due to the President of Pakistan, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. The appointment facilitated my work and made my object easier to attain.

I came to Madrid in May 1978. I was delighted to be in this beautiful land of beautiful people. I found the Spaniards to be lively and fun-loving, yet possessed of a dignity, an emotional sensitivity and a depth of spiritual feeling not often found in the West. I could not but observe time and again how the long Muslim presence in peninsula had shaped the character and personality of the Spain of today and the Spaniard of today. I felt at home in Spain.

For the first time in my studies I am up against a wall of prejudice – Western and Christian prejudice against Islam and the Orient. This applied with particular force to literature of the 18th and 19th Centuries and the early decades of the 20th Century. In this literature Western thinking was coloured by the colonial experience which gave rise to racial bias, religious intolerance and intellectual blindness. Even so profound a historian as Gibbon had to write in his *Decline and Fall:* "(Count Julian's) . . . rash invitation of the Moors and Arabs produced the calamities of eight hundred years". Even so prestigious a work of reference as The Encyclopedia Britannica, in an earlier, while describing the geography of Spain, had to say: "The closer physical connection with Africa than with the rest of Europe had the disastrous consequence of the Islamic invasion."

To this prejudice was added the fusion of legend with history, which made confusion worse confounded. This was due partly to writers who were not historians and perhaps never intended the historical fiction which they wrote to be taken seriously, and partly to historians accepting without question the myths which satisfied their pet preconceptions. The result of all this, among a people as romantic as the

Spaniards, has been an intermingling of fact and fiction to such an extent that at times they become inseparable.

However, I was glad to find that in Spain the virulence of the prejudice had abated. Indeed, to some extent it had been replaced by understanding, even appreciation, if only grudgingly expressed, of what Spain owed to its Islamic heritage. There was now a better realization, at least among the thoughtful, of the greatness and glory of Muslim rule, of the efficiency and justice of Muslim administration, of the contribution made by the Muslims to the culture and beauty of Spain. Prominent Spanish historians wrote with little prejudice, sometimes with no prejudice, about the Spanish Muslim Past.

This change of heart led to a consciousness of the importance of Islamic studies. The Spanish Government established the Spanish-Arabic Institute while the Government of Egypt opened the Institute of Islamic Studies in Madrid. The directors of these institutes, Don Francisco Utray Sarda and Dr. Alsayed Abdel Aziz Salem respectively, became my friends and offered all help. But the person whose advice and guidance I valued the most was Professor Emilio Garcia Gomez, the outstanding scholar-diplomat, whose contribution to Islamic Studies in Spain deserves to be better known in the Muslim world.

I learned Spanish. With this language added to my other languages I had available to me all the important sources which I needed. I was able to read Spanish scholars writing about the early Muslim period in Spain, which opened up another field of historical literature. It was a limited field because most of the material used by Spanish historians has been taken from Arabic sources, which I already possessed. However, this literature proved useful in giving me access to the Christian side of the story and to geographical details not otherwise available. And although the early Christian sources are inaccurate and unreliable, the dedication and painstaking efforts of modern Spanish scholars cannot fail to win our admiration.

During my research on Muslim Spain I found my work burdened, as in the case of my earlier books, by conflicting versions of the same event. A thorough study of all accounts helped to dispel much of the confusion but some

contradictions remain. In dealing with these contradictions I have used my own judgement to choose the most likely and most logical version, giving weightage to the more dependable historians. And I have not burdened the narrative of this history by including unlikely versions or drawing the attention of the reader to alternatives which deserve only to be discarded.

I travelled widely in Spain. I saw every place where a battle was fought. Of particular interest was the time I spent going over the ground of the Battle of Barbate (wrongly called the Battle of Guadalete) which was the first and fiercest battle between the Muslims and the Christians of Spain, at which Tariq shattered the Gothic army of King Roderic. During my first examination of this historic battlefield, in the spring of 1978, I had the company of Dr. Gamal Abdul Karim, an Egyptian Professor working at the University of Cadiz who shared my interest in Muslim history.

I went once again to see this battlefield, a year later, this time as a guest of Fernando Mora-Figueroa who runs one of the largest fincas (farms) in the country, one called Las Lomas. It included the northern part of the land which once formed the bed of the Lagoon of Janda. Don Fernando and I stood and looked at the battlefield from a hilltop at its southern end. I was surprised to find that part of the old battlefield was now under the water of a lake formed by a dam constructed on the River Celemin, upon which had rested Tariq's left flank. A system of dams and canals has been recently built by Fernando's father, Don Jose Ramon, and this system has transformed the appearance of the land, draining the ancient marshes and bringing the land under orderly cultivation.

Another enjoyable day was the one I spent at Merida in the company of Don Jose Alvarez y Saenz de Buruaga, the scholarly Director of the Museum. I saw the ancient Roman garrison town and capital of the large south-western province of Lusitania, the ruins of whose massive battlements bear witness to the citadel's awesome strength. Here Musa bin Nusair, who rightly claimed that he had never lost a battle, was unable to beat the defiant Goths into submission, in spite of a lengthy siege, and had to be content with a surrender on terms.

There were many more battlefield tours and visits to once embattled cities, fascinating to the scholar and of inestimable value to this writer, but a description of them all would try the readers' patience and has therefore been omitted. Suffice it to say that every such visit was an education. And when it coincided with a local carnival it was a joyful experience.

As a result of my study of Spain and its historical and cultural beauty and diversity, I could see that there was in almost every facet of its cultural life the imprint of its Muslim past. The Spaniard of today is proud to assert that *Spain is different*; and he is right. Spain is different. It is different because the Muslims were there.

By the end of 1979 most of my research work was done. However, it took me almost a year to complete the manuscript and prepare the maps, in which I was cheerfully assisted by my wife, Inge. It was not till the end of 1980 that these pages could go to press.

On completion of the work I was conscious of the grace and bounty of God and I thought of the words of Prophet Muhammad, on whom be the blessings of Allah; "I have been promised the east of the earth and the west; and whatever I have been promised will be mastered by my followers."

September 1980
Madrid, Spain.

A.I. Akram

A NOTE ON ARABIC NAMES

A brief explanation of the system of Arabic names would help the reader in understanding the filial relationship indicated by a name. It would also help him to understand why the same person is known by so many different names.

An Arab (and this system is still prevalent in many Arab societies) was known by three names. One was his own personal name, say Talha. Another was the name of his father, say Abdullah, and in this case he was known as Ibn or Bin Abdullah, i.e. son of Abdullah. The third was the name of his son, say Zaid. Thus he could be called Talha or Ibn Abdullah or Abu Zaid, the last being the most respectful way of addressing a person. In certain grammatical forms Abu is expressed as Abi.

Since the father too would be known by the name of son, the son would at times have a name like Talha Bin Abi Usman, i.e. Talha, son of the Father of Usman (Usman being a brother of Talha). A man could even be known as Talha Bin Abi Talha, which, translated literally, means: Talha, son of the Father of Talha.

The same rule applies to women. A girl by the name of Asma would be known as Asma Bint Abdullah, i.e. Daughter of Abdullah. And on becoming a mother she would take the name of her son or daughter, becoming known as Umm Zaid, i.e. Mother of Zaid.

In the pronunciation of Arabic names fine differences, as between S and Th or Z and Dh, have been ignored in this book, although to Arabs these differences are very real and the sounds quite distinct. To simplify pronunciation sounds commonly used in Pakistan – S and Z – have been used throughout the book.

THE ISLAMIC CALENDAR

Hijri Year	*Day*	*Christian Date*
90	Tuesday	20 November 708
91	Saturday	9 November 709
92	Wednesday	29 October 710
93	Monday	19 October 711
94	Friday	7 October 712
95	Tuesday	26 September 713
96	Sunday	16 September 714
97	Thursday	5 September 715
98	Tuesday	25 August 716
99	Saturday	14 August 717
100	Wednesday	3 August 718

The Islamic Months

1.	Muharram	7.	Rajab
2.	Safar	8.	Shaban
3.	Rabi-ul-Awwal	9.	Ramazan
4.	Rabi-ul-Akhir	10.	Shawwal
5.	Jamadi-ul-Awwal	11.	Zu Qad
6.	Jamadi-ul-Akhir	12.	Zul Haj

1. THE GENERALS

The Berber general stood at the tip of the continent of Africa and looked at the tip of the continent of Europe. He looked across the blue waters of the strait which separates the two continents and connects the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. It is a narrow strait, only eight miles wide where the continents are closest.

The general was a brilliant soldier. A veteran of many battles, he was a born leader and a bold and fearless warrior who would throw himself into the thickest of the fighting and use his weapons to deadly effect. Yet, he possessed the detachment to rise mentally above the cut and thrust of bloody combat and manoeuvre his troops with masterly skill. His quick grasp of military situations led invariably to success. And he could be very shrewd when the situation called for shrewdness.

The Berber was a tall, athletic, strongly-built man with a battle-hardened physique. He was a fair-skinned man with red hair and some deformity in one hand, probably the result of a wound taken in battle. He had a high forehead, denoting uncommon intelligence and judgement. He was a bit of a poet too, and known for an eloquence and mastery over words not commonly found in soldiers. A black mole covered with hair marked his left shoulder. He paid no attention to this mark, but it would soon acquire a special significance, as the reader will see a few chapters hence.

The tip of Africa where the general stood was a promontory stretching into the sea from the mainland of North Africa and connected to the mainland by a narrow

isthmus. This was Ceuta, or as the Arabs called it, Sabta. The general stood on a hill, the highest of seven which rose on the promontory. This hill had been known in ancient times as one of the Pillars of Hercules. It was an excellent viewpoint.

The general looked at Spain with keen interest. He studied the shoreline, observed the green hills rising from the coast towards the interior. What he examined most intently was the right edge of the visible shoreline of Spain where a mountain of granite rose more than a thousand feet above the sea. It was an enormous rock, two miles long, but from where the Berber watched it looked like a round twin-peaked hill. What the general did not know was that this hill would be known to future generations by his name. This mountain of granite was the Rock of Gibraltar...Jabal Tariq...the Hill of Tariq. The general's name was Tariq.

He was Tariq bin Ziyad bin Abdullah bin Walgho bin Warfajum bin Nabarghasin bin Walhaz bin Yatufat bin Nafzav. Some accounts have said that he was a Persian, which he was not. He was every bit a Berber, a noble-born Berber from the tribe of Nafza. He was also a freedman of Musa bin Nusair, in other words he had been a slave of Musa but had been given his freedom ... manumitted. About this also more will be said later.

Tariq bin Ziyad was one of the generals of Musa bin Nusair and performed an outstanding role in the conquest of the Maghreb. He commanded the detachment which led the advance of the Muslim army into the Maghreb. He conquered Tangier and made an attempt to storm Ceuta but was repulsed. He then led the advance of the Muslims into the hilly region of the High Atlas in what is now Morocco and played a prominent part in the subjugation of the Berber tribes known as the Masmuda. When the army returned to the coastal region of the north, Musa appointed him governor of Tangier and the surrounding districts and left with him a force of 12,000 Berber warriors.[1] That was two years ago.

Now Tariq stood on the hill known as the Pillar of Hercules and looked at the hill which would be known as the

1. The Khaldun (vol. 6, p. 220) gives the strength of this force as 17,000 Arabs and 12,000 Berbers. According to Gayangos (vol. 1, p. 253) it was 19,000 Berbers. These figures are exaggerated and probably refer to the full strength of Musa's army operating in the Maghreb.

Hill of Tariq. He looked at the hill with special interest because he had just been invited to conquer Spain. It was the year 709 (90 Hijri). The invitation had come from Count Julian.

*

Count Julian was the governor of Ceuta, which was the capital of the ancient province of Mauritania Tingitana. He had been governor of the entire province until the Muslims came and took away the province, leaving him only Ceuta to govern.

The city was originally Carthaginian, before becoming part of the Roman Empire. When the Germanic tribes took Spain from the Romans, the Vandal King Genseric crossed to Ceuta and razed the city to the ground. This happened in 423 A.D. It was reconquered in 535 by the Romans, this time the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium, then ruled by Justinian. He had the foundations of Ceuta restored and the city rebuilt. But a century later it again fell to the Germanic barbarians, this time the Visigoths of Spain. In 616 King Sisebut incorporated it into his domains and two years later his successor, Swinthila, made Ceuta, then called Septon, capital of the Gothic province of Hispania Transfretana.

Julian has been known by many names : Julian, Yulian, Balyan, Alyan, Alban.[1] Some Western writers have called him a Goth, which is not true. He was a Christian chief owing allegiance to the Gothic Court at Toledo, which always showed him the highest consideration and respect as Governor of Ceuta. He was a count because he was governor: the title went with the job. As for his being a Christian and owing allegiance to the Christian king of Spain, many Berbers in the province were Christian and owed allegiance to the Gothic king.

Some sources have even suggested that he was a Persian. According to one far-fetched account his noble ancestors had dwelt in the north of Mesopotamia as subjects

1. Part of the variation may be due, literally, to a slip of the pen when writing the name in Arabic. In the Arabic alphabet the difference between B and Y is only one dot. The two dots, if badly written, can be read as one dot changing Y to B.

of the Persian Empire; that they had been driven out by Muslim conquerors in the time of Caliph Umar and had sought refuge in the Roman Empire; that from here they had travelled to Ceuta while it was still part of the Roman Empire. This too is not correct. Julian was not a Persian.

Julian was a Berber. He was king of the large Berber tribe of Ghammara which inhabited the Hills of Ghammara and the surrounding region[1], which meant the region adjacent to and inland from Ceuta. As governor of an important province and as the Christian ruler of a large Berber tribe he was valued at the Visigothic court of Toledo as a trusted nobleman, a pillar of the realm.

Julian was a remarkably able man, a leader of resolution and courage with a high sense of personal and family honour. He was now getting on in years, but the years had given him experience and maturity which added to his finesse and skill in war and politics. He ruled over his Gothic province and his Berber kingdom with firmness and wisdom.

Thirty years before, when he was a young man, the Muslims had appeared for the first time in the Maghreb, under Uqba bin Nafe. Julian had avoided battle and submitted to Uqba without giving up his sovereignty. Just what political relationship he established with Uqba is not clear, but on the departure of that dashing conqueror from the Maghreb, Julian resumed his former position as governor of Ceuta and vassal of the King of Spain.

Then came Musa bin Nusair, in 707 (88 Hijri), destroying all opposition and scattering all Berber armies that stood in his path. Julian withdrew his forces into the fortresses of Tangier and Ceuta. Tariq, who led the Muslim forces, attacked and conquered Tangier but failed in his attempt to take Ceuta. A little later Musa himself laid siege to Ceuta. For some time the siege was pressed with vigour, but Julian broke it with a powerful sally which forced Musa to lift the siege and recall his besieging troops. The siege did not succeed because of the inaccessibility of the promontory that was Ceuta and because the fortress could be supplied by sea from Spain.

1. Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, pp. 253, 399.

Soon after the lifting of the siege Julian made peace with Musa. They came to terms and hostilities ceased. We do not know what these terms were but Julian retained his position as governor of Ceuta and continued to remain subordinate to the government of Spain. Musa had to content with this arrangement.

Now, two years later, Julian seethed with anger at the dishonour done to his family by the King of Spain. As an act of vengeance he invited the Muslims to Spain.

*

Musa bin Nusair was one of the great figures of early Islam. At this time, i.e. end of 90 Hijri (which ended on November 8, 709 AD) he was 69, in solar years. By Islamic reckoning, in lunar years, he was 71. A big, sturdy man grown bulky with age, he had spent a lifetime campaigning for Islam. His last battle was only two years in the past. He had been, for the last four years, Governor of Africa and the Maghreb.

These geographical terms need defining. Africa, or Afriqia as the Muslims called it, was not then the entire continent of Africa as we know it today. It was the northern belt of the continent of Africa, hardly more than a coastal zone, stretching from the present Libya across Tunisia to about the city of Algiers. In other words, it was the northern zone of the present Libya, Tunisia and the eastern part of Algeria. For the Romans too this was Africa, though sometimes they stretched it westwards to Tangier. What lay west of Afriqia, now the western part of Algeria and all of Morocco, was called the Maghreb which means, simply, the west. Nowadays we speak loosely of the Maghreb as comprising the region of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, but at the time this history is about it was more westerly, as defined above.

Musa's father, Nusair, had been a Christian. In 613 AD (12 Hijri), in the time of Caliph Abu Bakr, a Muslim army commanded by the illustrious Khalid bin Al Waleed conquered Western Iraq and found at the town of Ain-ut-Tamr a religious school or seminary where forty Arab boys were being educated for the priesthood. One of these was

Nusair, a boy from the tribe of Lakhm.[1] All the boys were taken away as slaves and in due course became Muslims. On growing to manhood Nusair became a personal bodyguard of Caliph Muawia at Damascus. Many years later he entered the service of Abdul Azeez bin Marwan, brother of Caliph Abdul Malik.

In 19 Hijri Nusair became father of a boy whom he named Musa. The boy grew straight and tall into a stalwart young man with intelligence, vigour and ambition. He became an outstanding soldier and took part in several naval expeditions. He was very close to Abdul Azeez, whom his father had served and, when Abdul Azeez was appointed governor of Egypt, Musa went with him to its capital, Fustat.

In 692 (73 Hijri) Musa was sent to Basra, in Iraq, on orders of the Caliph, to act as official in charge of revenue. He performed his duties efficiently, but some time after his appointment there were allegations of embezzlement against him. He was suspected of having kept part of the revenues of Basra to himself. Fearing the punishment of the blood-thirsty Hajjaj bin Yusuf, who was Governor of Iraq, Musa fled from Basra and took refuge with his friend and patron, Abdul Azeez, who was then in Damascus. Caliph Abdul Malik wished to have Musa executed and it was only the intervention of Abdul Azeez that saved him.[2] However, the Caliph levied upon him a fine of 100,000 gold dinars, of which he paid half and Abdul Azeez paid the rest,[3] This happened before the appointment of Abdul Azeez to Egypt.

Once in Egypt, Musa worked diligently and loyally for his master. With his intelligence, energy and organising ability, he proved an invaluable asset to the government. The Governor even sent him as head of a military expedition to crush a Berber revolt at Darna in the northeastern part of Libya. Musa carried out his task with such zeal and ruthlessness that the Berbers in the region would not raise their heads again for a long time. This was his first experience of Berbers.

1. According to some sources he belonged to the tribe of Bakr bin Wail.
2. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 203.
3. Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p. 40.

Early in 702 (83 Hijri) Abdul Azeez appointed him governor of Africa.[1] Musa set off with a sizable escort to take up his post at Qairowan (in present day Tunisia) which was the capital of the Muslim province of Africa. During this journey, while on the route of march, a sparrow flew towards Musa and landed on his shoulder. He caught the little bird, cut its throat, rubbed its blood on his beard and chest and then sprinkled what remained of it over himself. "This is victory!" he exulted, "by the Lord of the Kaba!"[2]

Not much of Africa had remained to Islam beyond Qairowan. Most of the Berber tribes had revolted and apostatised after having accepted the faith at the hands of earlier Muslim conquerors. Upon arrival at Qairowan Musa got down to improving the organisation of the province and preparing his forces to bring the Berbers into line, alongwith such of the Romans that remained in Africa – relics of Byzantine rule.

Musa launched many operations and conducted many campaigns, going from nearer to farther objectives. A great deal of blood was shed before his efforts were crowned with success and Africa brought once again under the rule of Islam. An estimated 300,000 Berber captives were taken in these operations, the largest number ever in any Muslim campaign. There was incredulity in Damascus when 60,000 captives of both sexes were brought in as spoils of war. Most of them, however, accepted Islam and were freed.

Musa was now famous in the world of Islam as a victorious general and empire-builder, though his name would shine even more brightly in the years ahead. He was addressed respectfully as Abu Abdur Rahman, i.e. Father of Abdur Rahman, after his eldest son.

In 705 (86 Hijri) Al Waleed became Caliph at Damascus and extended Musa's sphere of responsibility by appointing him governor of Africa and the Maghreb, which made him the first man to govern both these regions. But the Maghreb was not under his control. He would have to go and get it.

1. The year of this appointment is disputed. Some sources have given it variously as 78, 79 and even 88 Hijri.
2. Ibn Izari vol. 1, p. 41.

Two years later he did. His columns advanced westwards, shattering all opposition, overcoming all obstacles, taking more prisoners. As he neared Ceuta and Tangier, opposition weakened and the Muslim advance gathered speed. Tariq bin Ziyad commanded the leading elements of Musa's army and took Tangier by storm. But when he tried to do the same to Ceuta he was repulsed by Count Julian.

Musa next advanced south into the Sus, along the Atlantic coast and into the mountains of the High Atlas where a generation earlier the Muslim army of Uqba bin Nafe had nearly come to grief. But this time there was little opposition. The fierce tribes inhabiting the mountains, perhaps recalling the terrible punishment they had received at the hands of Uqba, submitted after a nominal resistance. Musa retraced his steps to Tangier.

Here he made one more attempt to take Ceuta. Directing operations in person, he invested the city, but as already stated he was forced to raise the siege. He failed where Tariq also had failed, thanks to the tenacity and skill of Count Julian. However, soon after the cessation of hostilities Julian made peace with the Muslims, without giving up his position as ruler of Ceuta and vassal of the King of Spain.

Musa left Tariq at Tangier as governor and as the man who would deal with Count Julian of Ceuta. Before returning to Qairowan, however, he organised a team of Muslim teachers to guide the Berbers in the ways of Islam. His campaign of the Maghreb was over. He would fight no more battles in the Maghreb.

Musa bin Nusair was one of the ablest men of his time, possessing administrative and organisational skill of the highest order. Once a brave young warrior, he was now a high commander confining himself to the direction of operations rather than combat, as a high commander should. He had a fine strategic sense. Later in life he would claim that he had never lost a battle, and he was right. If he was ruthless in dealing with the Berbers it was because of his determination to place Muslim rule in Africa and the Maghreb on a more permanent footing than his predecessors had done.

Over the next two years, after the reconquest of the Maghreb by Musa, there was an almost total conversion of the Berbers to Islam. And this time, unlike previous times, the conversion was to last. After Musa bin Nusair there would be no more apostasy in Africa and the Maghreb, at least not on a large scale. The Berbers would prove the staunchest of Muslims and the bravest of holy warriors.

Meanwhile, at his headquarters in Qairowan, in 90 Hijri, Musa received the invitation of Count Julian to invade Spain.

*

Mughees was known as Mughees al-Rumi, i.e. Mughees the Roman. Because of this appellation some historians believe that he was Roman, even Greek, because most of the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire who were called Roman were actually Greek. Western writers have even spoken of him as a renegade, which he was not. He was neither Roman nor Greek. He was an Arab, and a princely one.

He was Mughees bin Al Hanris bin Al Huwairis bin Jabla bin Al Aiham. He was a great-grandson of Jabla bin Al Aiham who was the last king of the Ghassan Arabs in Syria with his capital at Busra.

Jabla was a vassal of the Roman Emperor. At the Battle of Yarmuk in 636 he had commanded one of the four Roman armies with which Heraclius faced Khalid bin Al Waleed. After the Roman defeat Jabla accepted Muslim rule. However, as a result of a dispute with Caliph Umar he went away in a huff, with his family and many followers, and migrated to Roman imperial domains, settling down somewhere in what is now the south-eastern part of Turkey.

Nearly a half-century later a Muslim column raiding the Roman Empire penetrated to a place where the descendants of Jabla's Ghassan Arabs lived. They took many captives, one of whom was the boy Mughees, great-grandson of King Jabla bin Al Aiham. Because he had been captured in Roman domains where he lived as a Roman subject, they called him Mughees al-Rumi . . . the Roman. He came as a slave to the house of Caliph Abdul Malik.

The Caliph was struck by the intelligence and bearing of the child. Knowing of his princely birth he ordered that he be given a princely education along with his own son, Al Waleed.

The boy grew into a remarkable man, gifted with exceptional qualities of body and mind. He was sharp, clear-headed, eloquent. He wrote prose and poetry which the best of Arabs would be proud to claim as their own. It is said that verses written or extemporaneously recited by him would fill a volume. He became a skilled horseman and mastered the stratagems of war. Gradually he acquired fame for his prudence and wise counsel. He served under Musa bin Nusair in Africa and the Maghreb, where he distinguished himself in battle as a brilliant officer and a fearless fighter.

There is no record of his age at this time. Considering that he studied in school with Al Waleed he was probably of the same age, which would put him in his late thirties, approaching 40. He was known as the freedman of Al Waleed. He enjoyed close relations with, and had direct access to, Caliph Al Waleed, and this gave him an advantage which others were careful to respect.

Mughees was to play a dashing though not decisive role in the Muslim conquest of Spain. He was not destined to be one of the great generals of the conquest. What he did in battle could have been done by many others. His claim to fame rests not on what he did to Spain but on what he did to Musa bin Nusair and Tariq bin Ziyad.

2. THE DAUGHTER OF THE COUNT

It was a custom of the Goths in Spain for the nobles of the land, and this included high officials and military commanders, to send their children to the royal court at Toledo. They were sent to serve the royal family and to acquire a good education at the court, the entire expense of which was borne by the government. The nobles gained favour with the king and the children, on growing up, were often married off under the arrangements of the royal household. For girls the court would find worthy husbands and even pay the dowry. The custom was not very different to what has been the practice in European royal families up to our time, of young pages and ladies-in-waiting coming from the best families to serve at court.

Count Julian also followed this custom. He had a young and beautiful daughter, innocent and unspoilt, whom he loved dearly. Wishing for nothing more than her own good, he sent her to Toledo to be brought up and educated in the princely ways of the royal court. According to some Western historians Julian's wife was a Gothic princess, daughter of King Witiza of Spain who had died just before this history begins.[1] Though Muslim historians have said nothing about this princess, this could be true, seeing that a large number of Gothic girls chose Arab and Berber husbands over the next many generations. The name of the girl has been given by Western historians as Florinda and by Muslim historians as Cava. She could have had both names.

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1. Dozy : p. 230.

Some time after the arrival of Florinda, or Cava, at his court, King Roderic saw her bathing in the River Tagus which winds around Toledo. He was dazzled by her naked beauty. Overcome by desire, he determined to possess her at any cost.

Roderic tried persuasion, but persuasion failed. The girl would not agree to the King's proposal to gratify his passion. She wanted to preserve her chastity and honour. He went on pressing; she went on refusing. Finally, he resorted to violence. He forced himself upon her and ravished her.

When the deed was done he warned her to keep the matter to herself and not tell her father; and she was intelligent enough to assent. He even had her watched to see that she did not communicate with Julian. But the beautiful Florinda was not lacking in brains. At the first opportunity she got a message across to her father and informed him that she had been violated by Roderic. According to some accounts she was not able to write a letter because she was being watched all the time. So she sent him a few things as presents, without a letter, and one of these was a rotten egg. This rotton egg conveyed what she had to tell him.[1]

Count Julian flew into a violent rage. He was outraged. A Berber king was not to be so treated by anybody, least of all the barbarian Goths of Spain. "By the faith of the Messiah," he swore, "I shall undermine his throne and destroy his kingdom."[2]

The count was cunning enough to conceal his feelings when he crossed to Spain and travelled to Toledo to fetch his daughter. This was an unusual time for him to visit Toledo. He normally visited the King in the summer, taking presents with him, but now it was January 709 (Rabi-ul-Awwal 90 Hijri). It was cold and unpleasant.

King Roderic was not pleased to see the Governor of Ceuta. He was suspicious, and asked him why he had come at this time.

Julian spoke artfully of his wife's illness. He said she was very ill, in fact on her deathbed, and did not have long to live. Her only desire was to see her beloved daughter for the last time. The girl was the dearest thing in her life. She had

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 44; Gayangos: vol. 1, appx D, p. 44.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 252.

to see her before she died. Would the King please let her go? There was no time to lose.

Roderic was taken in. He agreed to let Florinda go. But before she departed he spoke with her separately, enjoined silence and told her how much he honoured her father.

Julian returned to Ceuta with his dishonoured daughter with only the three of them knowing what had happened. He planned vengeance against King Roderic: he would get the Muslims to Spain!

Some later Western writers have cast doubt upon the story of Florinda, suggesting that it probably grew out of the lively imagination of Arab writers. The objectors have offered no proof, not even argument against the story. The objections are not only untenable but also unfair.

In the first place, during the first 500 years of Islam Muslim historians were the only worthwhile historians in the world (excepting China, of course) while European scholars were struggling to get out of the mud of the Dark Ages. In the second place, it was not only the Muslim historians who narrated the rape of Florinda. It was also accepted as authentic by the early Spanish writers and was included in a historical document called *Cronica General de Espana,* prepared at Toledo in the 13th Century under the orders of King Alfonso the Wise.

In the opinion of this writer, the story of Florinda is not only a true story, as related by the historians, but also the main reason for Julian's invitation to the Muslims to invade Spain. There may have been other reasons too, but by ravishing his daughter King Roderic virtually pushed the Governor of Ceuta into revolt.

Count Julian, having made up his mind to punish Roderic by getting the Arabs and Berbers to attack the kingdom, thought with grim humour of his parting exchange of words with the King. Roderic was fond of hunting and had earlier asked Julian for hawks from Africa, which he had found to be the best hunting birds. As Julian took his leave, the King said : "Have you found us some hawks?"

"I have found you hawks," replied Julian, "such as you have never seen before. I shall soon come with them![1]

*

Julian first spoke to Tariq, Governor of Tangier. He told him of the outrage committed upon his daughter's chastity and his own honour, of his desire for revenge. He invited him to invade Spain, offering to guide him in person and conduct his soldiers through the enemy's territory. As a temptation to Tariq he described the beauty of Spain and the weakness of the people, their lack of courage and determination to defend their land.

Tariq had a large enough army under his command to go straight for Spain. Nothing would have given him and his bold warriors greater pleasure. But he was a subordinate general and could not take such a major decision on his own. He referred Julian to his master in Qairowan.[2]

Julian promptly travelled to Qairowan. The distance of a thousand miles took some time to cover, but upon arrival at the Muslim capital of Africa he lost no time in seeking a meeting with Musa bin Nusair. As soon as the two men were together Julian put before Musa his proposal for an invasion of Spain.

As an inducement he described Spain in glowing terms: its excellence, its fertility and wealth, its abundance of productions of all kinds, its richness in grains, the fullness of its sweet and clear waters, the beauty of its inhabitants. To assure the Muslim Commander-in-Chief of the ease of the task, Julian outlined the condition of the men of Spain, weakened by internal strife and enervated by luxurious living, without weapons and without courage. He was exaggerating the last part, of course, but he put it across most eloquently.

Julian would himself act as guide to the Muslims in the crossing of the strait and also within Spain. He would

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 44. There are other versions of this exchange, but the essence is the same.

2. Some historians have related Julian's approach to Tariq. Others have said that he went direct to Musa at Qairowan, without first broaching the subject with Tariq. The former version is more likely.

provide the vessels needed for transporting the Muslim army to Spain. Julian owned four large boats which plied the strait regularly for ferrying men and goods between the continents. Julian would put them at the disposal of the Muslims and even provide the crews.

It was a tempting picture that Julian drew. And since there were no more conquests left in North Africa it offered another opening for the holy war, another land for Musa to conquer for Islam. But he had to be sure that Julian was being sincere in his offer, that he was not trying to draw the Muslims into a trap.

"We do not doubt what you say," said Musa to Julian, "and we do not doubt you personally. However, we hesitate to put the Muslims in peril in a land which they do not know. Between them and us will be a sea while between you and your king will be the bond of ignorance and the community of religion. But return to your place and get together your troops and those who feel as you do. Raid your land. Make a break between yourself and your land. And if you agree to this we are with you, if Allah wills it."[1]

Musa was putting the Berber Chief to the test. He was demanding that Julian desert the Gothic cause, make a clean break with it, and as evidence of the change launch a hostile incursion into Gothic territory. He would have to prove that he now regarded the Spaniards and his coreligionists as enemies.

To this Julian readily agreed. He took leave to prepare and carry out the armed incursion as demanded by Musa.

This meeting took place some time in the summer of 709 (about Ramazan or Shawwal 90 Hijri).

*

Julian launched his raid against the coast of Spain towards the end of 90 Hijri (this would be about October 709). Organising a raiding party of Christian Berbers, he crossed the strait in two vessels and landed at Algeciras, known to the Muslims as Jazeerat-ul-Khazra i.e. the Green Island. The

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 45.

place was so named because of a small islet on one side of the harbour.

The raid was completely successful. Julian's men ravaged the surrounding district, killed and plundered and collected a sizable lot of captives from the Spaniards inhabiting the coastal area. With these spoils they returned to Ceuta, to be greeted with joy by their fellow Berbers.

Julian again travelled to Qairowan to see the Muslim Governor. He had given proof of his loyalty. The captives and other spoils were there for all to see, and the Muslims were struck by the beauty of the captives. They were indeed as he had said. Julian described the raid, emphasising the ease with which he had carried out the operation and the defencelessness of Spain, certainly of the coastal region. He again urged an invasion of the Gothic kingdom.

Musa agreed to do so, but only when he was ready. The Berber count was sent back to his command at Ceuta. Thereafter he acted as an important source of intelligence for the Muslims, giving them all the information which could be useful in planning and preparing the expedition. He waited anxiously for the day when he would put paid to the account of King Roderic.

*

Musa now had complete trust in Julian. He judged rightly that the Berber Chief would not betray the Muslims so long as their actions were directed at the vengeance which Julian sought. While Julian may have thought that the Muslims would come and plunder and then return to North Africa, Musa had deeper designs. All he needed was the sanction of the Caliph to launch a campaign against the Christian kingdom of Spain. Consequently, he wrote to Caliph Al Waleed at Damascus, told him of the invitation of Count Julian, the success of his raid and the condition of Spain as he understood it to be. He asked for the Caliph's permission to start operations against the Gothic kingdom.

The Caliph was cautious. "Send small parties to reconnoitre the land," he wrote to his governor, "so that you may know its condition. Do not expose the Muslims to danger in a fearful sea."

Musa was amused at the reference to the strait as a fearful sea. He wrote back, "It is not a swollen sea. It is only a strait in which a man can always see the shore behind him."

The Caliph was not to be moved. "Even if it be so," he wrote to Musa, "no harm is done by a reconnaissance before plunging into it."[1]

This correspondence took some months because of the distance of 4000 miles between Qairowan and Damascus. But at last Musa got the Caliph's permission, subject to the proviso of a reconnaissance in force. This operation was carried out in July 710 (Ramazan 91 Hijri).

The commander of the reconnaissance, which was neither more nor less than a raid, was a Berber freedman of Musa named Tareef bin Malik, Abu Zur'a Al Ma'afari. He took a force of 400 Berbers, of whom a hundred were mounted, in Count Julian's four boats and landed at a point on the Spanish coast now known as Tareefa, after this raider. He remained near the coast for a few days, striking left and right, and got as far as Algeciras, 20 miles away. Then he returned to the African coast laden with spoils and accompanied by many captives. Once again the Muslims marvelled at the beauty of the Spanish people. Once again Musa found evidence of Spain's vulnerability to attack.

There would be no more reconnaissances. The stage was set for the Muslim invasion of Spain. But a good deal of time would be required for the preparation of the expeditionary force and for mounting the operation before the actual crossing could be effected. Nothing more could be done this year, 91 Hijri, which ended on October 28, 710.

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Mention has been made of two Berber officers in these two chapters: Tariq and Tareef — both fine, gallant commanders. They have both been described by historians as freedmen of Musa bin Nusair. In other words, they had been slaves of Musa but had been given their freedom. This needs explanation, lest the reader go away with the impression that they were ordinary slaves bought in a slave market, lucky

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 253; Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol. 4, pp. 213-4.

enough to win their freedom, luckier still to rise to high military office.

In those days warriors taken captive in war were regarded as slaves. Four-fifths of their number were distributed among the victorious soldiers as their share of the spoils. One-fifth of their number, the share of the spoils which according to Quranic law belonged to the state, were sent to Damascus where they were sold in the slave market. But these captives could also be held to ransom by the enemy, either against direct cash payment or in exchange for Muslim captives in enemy's hands. A warrior-captive-slave was usually a highly prized individual.

While no historian has told us how these two men became slaves of Musa, it is evident that they were captured in battle while Musa was fighting the Berbers during his campaign in Africa and on his march to the Maghreb, where the two of them belonged. They fell to Musa's lot. Both accepted Islam. Seeing the high quality of his captive-slaves, Musa let them free and appointed them as officers in his army, to command Berber contingents which were also formed of freed captive-slaves who converted to Islam. Thus Tariq led the advance guard of the Muslims to Tangier and captured that port-city.

There may be other explanations, but it is obvious that they were not slaves in the normal sense of the word. Tariq and Tareef were both well-born Berbers from the Maghreb, veteran soldiers experienced in war. Men like Tariq and Tareef were not to be found in slave markets. We are even told that the descendents of Tariq settled in Spain vehemently rejected any suggestion that their ancestor had been a slave of Musa.[1]

The reader will get to know Tariq better in the chapters that follow. But Tareef appears only briefly in the Battle of Barbate, whereafter he is not mentioned any more in the accounts of the conquest of Spain. He was probably there but did not distinguish himself sufficiently to attract the attention of historians. His name does, however, reappear in history thirty years later.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 254.

When the Berber tribes of the Maghreb revolted against Arab rule, under Maisara, Tareef was with Maisara. The civil war that followed cost thousands of Muslim lives before it ended, and even disturbed Muslim unity in Spain. When Maisara was killed, Tareef was chosen by the Berber tribe of Barghawata as its Chief and became the ancestor of a long line of chiefs or kings, as some historians call them.[1]

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Before we go further with the invasion of Spain by the Muslims it would be useful to describe briefly the geography of the land. This would help the reader in following the various operations which constitute the conquest of the country. This description applies not to the Spain of today, with the state of Portugal occupying the western segment of the peninsula, but to the entire peninsula known as Iberia.

Spain is a subcontinent. In a way it is both Europe and Africa, and the best of both. It is separated from Africa by the Strait of Gibraltar and from Europe by the Pyrenees Mountains, the former being no more significant as an obstacle than the latter. The Pyrenees are in some ways a greater obstacle to movement. It is interesting to note that the Sierra Nevada — the most prominent mountain range in the south — is geologically a continuation of the Riff Mountains of North Africa, across the strait. The bed of the River Guadalquiver is believed by geologists to be the remains of a former strait between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, with all south of it as part of the continent of Africa. Later movements of the earth's crust reduced it to an opening to the Atlantic only. Because of this unique geographical position Spain has been a meeting point between the two continents and a springboard for movement in both directions.

It is a vast peninsula of nearly a quarter million square miles. It is a land of striking contrasts : alpine mountains rising above the snowline and overlooking fertile valleys; wide plains of tableland broken by mountain ranges called *sierras* — Spanish for "saw", because of the rugged

1. Ibn Izari : vol. I, p. 223.

skyline of the ridges. All but an eighth of the peninsula's outline is a sea-shore washed by the waters of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean; and almost all its coast is hilly, except for bays and gulfs and river deltas which often consist of low, swampy ground.

Broadly, the peninsula is corrugated by three major east-west ranges: the Cantabrians in the north, the Guadarramas in the centre and the Sierras in the south. The land is watered by many rivers, big and small. Of the five big ones the Ebro empties into the Mediterranean but the other four, viz the Tagus, the Duero, the Guadiana and the Guadalquivir, flow west into the Atlantic. The Ebro is the only one which plays no part in the watering of the meseta.

The *meseta* is the central plateau of Spain comprising more than half the surface of the peninsula. With an average elevation of 2000 feet it is the highest plateu in Europe except for Switzerland. It slopes gently and imperceptibly from north to south and from east to west. A hard, windswept tableland, it is divided by the *Cordillero* (range of mountains) into north and south, the two parts corresponding to what later appeared in history as Old and New Castile.

The mountains of Spain, though given above as three major ranges, subdivide into several sub-ranges and many mini-ranges, not all of which are mentioned here. The major ones are described below in a few words.

The Cantabrians are the northern-west, hanging over the coastline of the Cantabrian Sea. Misty, cold and forest-clad, they cradle gentle valleys and are the most European in form and climate. The Pyrenees are an easterly extension of the Cantabrians, a massif of granite rock with peaks over 11,000 feet and an average height greater than the Alps. They run like a high crenellated wall for 280 miles from the Bay of Biscay to the north-western corner of the Mediterranean. They, too, contain within their bosom curving valleys and green pastures.

In the centre of the peninsula runs the range of mountains called the Iberian System, from the Atlantic coast near Lisbon to north and north-east of Madrid and onwards towards Catalunia in the north-east of the peninsula. There are several sierras in this range with gaps separating their ends. The most beautiful is the Sierra de Guadarrama, a

corruption of the Arabic Wadi-ur-Ramal – the valley of sand – a river from which the mountains take their name.

In the south is the valley of the Guadalquivir, known in Roman times as Baetis, which separates the Sierra Morena to its north from the Sierra Nevado to its south. The latter contains the highest crests in the peninsula, rising to over 11,000 feet. It slopes gradually to south and south-east and has deep traverse valleys on both flanks. This was the mountain range destined to see the longest Muslim rule in Spain and witness its tragic end in the fall of Granada.

There are other hilly areas in the peninsula, like the Galician and Portuguese ledges in the west and several smaller sierras. These are not, however, important enough to this history to deserve special mention.

The most important part of Spain from our point of view is the southern region, known today as Andalucia. It stretches from the Atlantic in the west to the Mediterranean in the east and comprises one quarter of the peninsula. This region of bright sunshine and ample water nourishes the most fertile soil, especially the broad valley of the Guadalquivir. Except for this valley most of the region is hilly, but even the hilly areas contain deep valleys with rich soil. It was the beautiful coastal zone of this region which attracted the earliest settlers and witnessed the earliest civilisations of Spain. It was to become the real, typical, Muslim Spain.

But the Muslims called the entire country Andalus, and the historian Razi described it in the following words:

> "A generous upland, because of the nature of its creation, the goodness of its soil, the abundance of its cultivable land, the ample sources of its springs and fulness of its rivers, its freedom from burning heat and the gentleness of its climate, its extremes never rising to be unpleasant or to harm the body.
> "And so are all its attributes, all mild and moderate. Its fruits continue the year round, never ending. Its coasts and neighbouring regions are ever shining in splendour with first fruits. Its goodness endures all the time."[1]

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 140.

The early Muslims noted the richness and beauty of Spain and other lands in the possession of the Christians along the northern littoral of the Mediterranean. They thought of these lands as endless gardens, and seeing all this, some of them believed that God had given the Christians paradise in this world because they were not going to get it in the next.[1]

1. *Ibid:* p. 137.

3. SPAIN BEFORE ISLAM

The earliest fossilised evidence of man in Spain goes back 200,000 years. It was the Neanderthal man. 50,000 years ago utencils were being used by cave-dwellers believed to belong to the Cromagnon race. Then appeared cave paintings, during the Paleolithic period from 25,000 to 10,000 BC, which depicted cold weather animals like mammoths, bears, bison, lions, reindeer. The authors of these cave-paintings were savages. And the peninsula, like the rest of Europe, was cold and icy, before the last ice age ended.

The first people known to establish civilisation in Spain were the Iberians, though they were not then so called. They came from "White Africa." They were not black, and they were not European. They began to infiltrate north from Africa around 3,000 BC, and while most of them settled in the south many groups eventually moved along the coast up to the north-eastern part of the peninsula. They were to act as the racial bedrock upon which future cultures would be founded.

It was probably these Iberians who established the culture known as "Almeria" in the south of Spain, facing both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean.[1] It lasted from 3,000 to 2,000 BC. It was a society of wealthy lords and a slavelike population practising agriculture and maritime trade.

1. This Almeria as a culture is not to be confused with the port-city of Almeria founded by the Muslims.

This was followed by the "El Argar" culture in the same region from 1700 to 1000 BC. Their mining and metallurgy were quite advanced, with bronze, silver and gold being mined and worked. They made weapons and jewelry. This culture spread to the centre of the peninsula and the south-eastern coastal region and crossed to the Balearic Islands.

As the above culture declined, around 1000 BC, Spain saw the rise of its last native culture: Tartessan. The Tartessans were probably the direct descendents of the Iberians, but may have been invaders from Africa akin to the Iberians. They built the city of Tartessus near the present Cadiz, which is believed to be the Biblical Tarsheesh. The Tartessans had a rich kingdom whose economic structure included fishing, farming and mining. They sailed the Atlantic. They were the first in Spain to have a written system and literature.

Then came the foreign trading nations. The first of these were the Phoenicians from Tyre, in Palestine. Attracted by trade and agriculture, they came in the 11th Century BC (according to some accounts in the 8th Century) and built many cities, including Cadiz and Malaga on the mainland and Ibiza on the Balearic Islands. So rich was Spain in precious metals that it was believed by the Phoenicians that the inhabitants plated their anchors with gold!

In the 8th Century BC the Greeks also appeared and in course of time they also traded with the peninsula. They founded a number of towns and trading posts in the south and south-east. By the 5th Century BC there was a system of writing on the peninsula which used Greek and Phoenician characters.

The earliest West Europeans in Spain came from the north and were known as Celts (Greek Celtoi; Roman Gaul). They came from what is now France and southern Germany, and in the 7th or 6th Century BC entered Spain and occupied the northern part of it. According to some sources there were two invasions of Celts, the first in the 9th and the second in the 6th Century BC, but they were peaceful invasions. The Celts were a tall, fair race, culturally backward, who mixed easily with the Iberians. The result of this mixture was

another people, called the Celti-berians, who inhabited Central Spain.

By now – the middle of the first millennium BC – the peninsula had received the name of Iberia. Greek sailors called the people of the east coast Iberians, i.e. those who dwelt in the valley of the River Iberus, which was Greek for Ebro, which in turn was taken from the original Celtic Aber, meaning river. The use of the name spread and the entire peninsula came to be called Iberia and its inhabitants Iberians.

This was only one of the names of the land. Before Iberia it was called Hispania, believed to be a Punic word meaning the Land of Rabbits. Later the Romans too called it Hispania. This was used concurrently with the Iberia of the Celts and the Greeks, but another Greek name of the country was Hesperia, i.e. the Occident.

The Muslims knew the peninsula as Andalus and believed in the legend that the first people to enter Spain after the Flood were led by Andalus, great-grandson of Noah. This Andalus gave his name to the land. They also believed that a Roman named Ishban bin Teetash (Titus?) later conquered the peninsula and named it Ishbania, from which Hispania later evolved. Ishban is credited with founding the city of Ishbeelya, which is the Arabic name for Seville.

Actually, the name Andalus came from the Vandals, the Germanic barbarians whose story is related later in this chapter. Before going on to North Africa they stayed awhile in the south of Spain, in the province which the Romans had named Baetica but which the Vandals called after themselves : Vandalicia. This was later changed to Andalus. The Muslims used this word for the entire peninsula, though in the present day it denotes only the southern region of Spain.

The three best known names of the peninsula were Iberia, Hispania and Andalus.

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With the arrival of the Carthaginians in the middle of the first millennium BC Spain enters a better recorded period of its history. The Phoenicians already in Spain, pressed in local wars, turned for help to the Carthaginians in North

Africa, who were people of the same stock though with a Berber mixture. They came to Spain in about 500 BC, but not just to help the Phoenicians. They came and stayed, and over the centuries increased their domination of the land. They destroyed Tartessus. They developed Cadiz as a commercial centre. Eventually, with the fall of Tyre in the 4th Century BC, they took over all the Phoenician cities in Spain and established more colonies of their own.

The Carthaginians had been in Spain for almost $2^{1/2}$ centuries when the Punic Wars began between Rome and Carthage. The first one, 264-241 BC, was won by the Romans who occupied most of the peninsula. But a few years later, in 237, the Carthaginian Hamilcar landed in Spain and reoccupied the south and south-east. He built Akra Leuke, now Alicante. Shortly afterwards his son-in-law, Hasdrubal, destroyed the city of Massia on the south-eastern coast and refounded it as Carthago Nova (New Carthage), now Cartagena.

Another war was inevitable, and the second Punic War was fought in 219-202 BC. After winning a number of victories under the brilliant generalship of Hannibal, son of Hamilcar, the Carthaginians in the end went down before the Romans. The latter reoccupied Spain, and before the 3rd Century BC had ended they were in complete control of the peninsula. The Carthaginians were again driven out of Spain, this time never to return.

Now began the Roman period of Spanish history. The Romans made Spain part of their empire. In 197 BC they organised it in two large provinces (Hispania Citerior and Hispania Ulterior i.e. nearer and farther) which were later to be subdivided into three.[1] They stationed their army in several towns to enforce the Roman law and maintain the Roman peace.

In 167 BC the Roman Government abolished all direct taxation in Italy. Thereafter Rome lived off imperial tribute and slaves, and this in turn called for a constant subjugation of territories and robbing them of their wealth for the comfort and glory of Rome.

1. The sub-division was done in 27 BC; the three provinces were Lusitania in the south-west, Tarraconensis in the north-east and Baetica in the south.

This extortionate rule, made possible by harsh and brutal methods, had the inevitable result of making the Romans hated in Spain, as elsewhere. The Romans looked upon the Spaniards as barbarians and savages, as indeed most Spaniards were, and condescendingly went on to Romanise the people. They established colonies and garrisons. They made Latin universal, with the result that Celtic, Greek and Iberian disappeared from the peninsula.

There were revolts against Roman rule which went on for generations. The Spaniards resisted stubbornly but in vain. The rebels were no match for the sophisticated and well-armed power of Rome which acted not only with political and military skill but also with deceit, treachery and assassination. The revolts were suppressed mercilessly. The Roman Empire prevailed in Spain and was to last more than 600 years before it was ousted by the Germanic tribes.

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The first of the Germanic tribes to make their appearance in Spain were the Cumbri and the Teutones. They made their way into the country at the end of the 2nd Century BC but were driven out by the Romans. Next came the Franks — a group of North Germanic tribes settled in Gaul, who took Tarragona in the north-east and then marched across the peninsula and across the strait into North Africa, where they were dispersed. This happened in about the middle of the 3rd Century AD.

The first of the Germanic tribes which actually conquered and ruled Spain came in 409 AD.[1] They were the Vandals, the Alans and the Suevi (Swabians) who poured across the Pyrenees and over a period of two years acquired effective control over the country. The Suevi and the Asdingi Vandals divided Galicia between them, in the north-west of Spain, while the Alans dispersed over the middle belt of the peninsula from Lusitania (later Portugal) to Cartagena. Some Silingi Vandals later separated from their brothers and settled in the southern part of Spain, which also contained

1. This event is placed also in 414.

the most fruitful territories. We call them tribes, but they were actually entire nations containing tribes within them.

Soon there was civil war among the barbarian nations in which the Goths also took part. They came across the Pyrenees in 418 under King Wallia, exterminated the Silingi Vandals, and in a fierce battle near Merida in 419 killed King Atax of the Alans, who then joined the remaining Vandals and lost their identity. The Vandals and the Suevi were driven into Galicia, after which the Goths handed the north of Spain back to the Romans, who were still nominally the rulers, and retired across the Pyrenees to the south of France.

This was followed by war between the Suevi and the Vandals in 428. The Vandals won, but after victory they migrated to the south of Spain. They stopped for a while in the old Roman province of Baetica, to which they gave the name Vandalicia. A year later the entire Vandal nation under King Gaeseric crossed to North Africa and lived through an eventful, bloody and piratical history which included the sack of Rome in 455, but that is outside the scope of this history. Spain was well rid of them.

The coming of the Germanic nations was to inflict upon Spain the most fearful and most painful period of its history. They brought horrors and suffering such as Spain had not known in a thousand years of foreign subjugation. The hordes of Changez Khan were merciful compared with these barbarians. What the country saw in the years of Germanic domination is most eloquently described in the powerful prose of Edward Gibbon. Taking his material from the Spanish historian Idatius, Gibbon writes, in his *Decline and Fall:*

> The irruption of these nations was followed by the most dreadful calamities: as the barbarians exercised their indiscriminate cruelty on the fortunes of the Romans and the Spaniards, and ravaged with equal fury the cities and the open country. The progress of famine reduced the miserable inhabitants to feed on the flesh of their fellow creatures; and even the wild beasts, who multiplied, without control, in the desert, were exasperated by the taste of blood and the impatience of hunger boldly to attack and devour their human prey. Pestilence soon appeared, the inseparable companion of famine; a large proportion of the people was swept away; and the groans of the dying excited only the envy of their surviving friends...
>
> At length the barbarians, satiated with carnage and rapine, and afflicted by the contagious evils which they themselves had introduced, fixed their permanent seats in the depopulated country . . . The conquerors contracted with their new subjects some reciprocal arrangements of protection and obedience: the lands were again cultivated; and the towns and villages were again occupied by a captive people. The greatest part of the Spaniards was even disposed to prefer this new condition of poverty and barbarism to the severe oppressions of the Roman Government . . .[1]

Reinhart Dozy, the renowned Dutch orientalist of the 19th Century, paints a similar picture, though he is kinder to the Romans. In his *History of the Muslims in Spain,* he says:

> Those were days of horror . . . Roman despotism, insupportable though it was, was clement in comparison with the brutality of the barbarians. The calculated tyranny of the Caesars had at least been orderly and measured; but the Teutons in their blind savagery overthrew and destroyed indiscriminately all that they encountered in their course. Utter desolation fell upon town and country. In the wake of this havoc followed scourges, if possible, yet more terrible - pestilence and famine: starving mothers slew their children to feed upon their flesh.[2]

The above description applied not only to the Vandals, the Suevi and the Alans, but to the Germanic nations as a whole, including the Goths whose story now follows.

*

1. Gibbon: vol. 3; pp. 275-6.
2. Dozy: pp. 219-20.

The Goths, barbarians of the Teutonic race, are believed to have originated in Sweden. They first settled in the Vistula basin and then moved south to Hungary and the Valley of the Danube. From here they divided into two large groups, and depending on the direction in which they moved, were named Visigoths (West Goths) and Ostrogoths (East Goths). In some areas they mingled into one nation.

In 418 AD the Roman government settled the Visigoths in the province of Aquitania Secunda, on the Atlantic seaboard of Gaul, as federates of imperial Rome owing military service to the empire. It was from here that they raided Spain, as mentioned earlier, and made short work of the Vandals, the Suevi and the Alans. In the second half of the 5th Century they established their own kingdom at Toulouse, independent of Rome, which included parts of Spain. Gothic rule over Spain had now begun, but as part of the kingdom of Toulouse, and only the north-eastern corner of Spain was under their control.

The Visigothic kingdom of Spain began with Theudis (531-48). He was actually an Ostrogoth, but those who followed him were Visigoths and the kingdom came to be known as Visigothic. Theudis conquered Toledo in 546. However, it was a successor, Leovigild (568-86), who transferred the capital to Toledo and went on to subdue Galicia in the north-west of Spain, where the Suevi had once ruled.

Gradually the Visigoths moved south until the entire peninsula was theirs. There were many revolts against their rule but all were fiercely crushed. The centuries of the Goths were to remain a period of frequent warfare; when they were not fighting their rebellious subjects they were fighting amongst themselves.

The first of the foreign powers which the Goths in Spain had to deal with, after the collapse of Roman rule in the peninsula, were the Byzantines — the Eastern Roman Empire based on Constantinople. Emperor Justinian was anxious to establish the empire in its full greatness of earlier centuries and sent expeditionary forces to reconquer Italy, North Africa and Spain. His forces landed in Spain in 552, and after several battles occupied the southern part of the country from Medina Sidonia to Cartagena.

The opposition of the Goths did not weaken. The skilful Byzantines were able to hold their own by playing off Gothic nobles against one another, but slowly and steadily the area under their control dwindled. Finally, in 624, King Swinthila inflicted a decisive defeat upon them at Cartagena, which city, with characteristic ferocity, the Goths destroyed. This spelt the end of Byzantine rule in Spain.

All Spain was now Visigothic. Their realm, organised in six provinces, stretched from Narbonne in the north-east (now in France) to the Strait of Gibraltar in the south. There was none to dispute their authority on the peninsula or in the North African colony of Mauritania Tingitana with its capital of Ceuta, which was to be ruled many years later by Count Julian, the Berber king of the Ghammara.

In a later chapter we will go into Gothic rule in greater detail : their religion, their method of government, their treatment of their slavelike subjects. Here we will confine ourselves to certain pertinent events of their political history. We will take up the affairs of the Visigoths at the beginning of the 8th Century, which more intimately concerns the Muslim invasion of Spain.

*

In the Visigothic kingdom of Spain there was no tradition of peaceful dynastic succession. The monarchy was strictly elective. Upon the death of a king a senate of nobles would meet and decide upon his successor. The bishops also exercised influence in the matter, confirming the selection of the senate. But seldom was there a peaceful and orderly succession. The assassination of Visigothic rulers by their subjects was almost a matter of routine. In the course of two centuries of Visigothic rule only two kings were followed by their sons for more than two years.

Because of this, kings would associate their sons with the throne during their lifetime in the hope that they would continue to reign after them. Sometimes the stratagem worked. Thus, in 700, King Egica appointed his son Witiza as joint ruler with him. Egica died two years later and Witiza continued to reign. He ruled for nine years and apparently was a good king.

Witiza had a brother named Oppas who was archbishop of Toledo and Seville and thus the highest dignitary of the church in Spain. The king also had three sons, viz Akhila, Olmondo and Ardabasto.[1] Wanting Akhila to succeed him as king, Witiza appointed him Duke of Terraconesis, the large north-eastern province of Spain, where he would gain experience and get accustomed to wielding power. At the beginning of 709 Witiza died.[2]

His death was followed by tumult and disorder. The Goths were not satisfied with the sons of Witiza and this led to widespread agitation in the kingdom. Finally, the senate gave the crown to a noble Goth named Roderic, who had been commander of the Gothic cavalry under Witiza and also Duke of Baetica, the southern and richest province of Sapin. The selection was approved by the bishops and welcomed by most of the officials. Roderic was a distinguished general, known for his courage and military talents and widely admired for his ability as soldier and statesman. All in all he was one of the most powerful nobles of the land and the best choice for the throne, though not of royal blood.

There were those who attributed malice to Roderic. His father, who had been Duke of Baetica before him, had been assassinated at the behest of, or with the connivance of, King Witiza, and his enemies suspected him of seeking vengeance. But since the monarchy was elective Roderic was in no way bound to support the claims of the sons of Witiza. Perhaps he influenced the senate in coming to a favourable decision with regard to himself by gathering a strong cavalry force at his provincial capital of Cordoba. However, he had the support of most of the nobles, most of the bishops and most of the officials, and was thus no usurper. In the summer of 709 (perhaps 710) he was proclaimed King of Spain.[3]

1. Ardabasto is called Artabas by Ibn-ul-Qutya (p. 2) who names a son Rumula instead of Akhila.
2. Most Western historians have given the year of Witiza's death as 710. In view of the fact that Julian's raid was carried out in about October 709 (end of 90 Hijri, as recorded accurately by Muslim historians) and much happened between this raid and the king's death, the latter event would have to have occurred in 709.
3. Some histories give the year of this event as 710, which seems unikely in view of the fact that Witiza died in early 709, perhaps even at the end of 708. The earlier date also fits better with the timing of later events—Julian's invitation, Tareef's raid—which have been accurately recorded by Muslim historians.

The younger sons of Witiza – Olmondo and Ardabásto – fled to Galicia with their mother and their uncle, Bishop Oppas, but Akhila, Duke of Terraconesis, challenged Roderic's right to the throne and sent an army against him to Toledo. This army was easily beaten and scattered by Roderic, whereupon the princes submitted to the new king and reconciled themselves to a throneless existence. What happened to Akhila is not known, but the two younger sons of Witiza were treated generously by King Roderic and given appointments in the army. The submission of the princes and their uncle Oppas was, however, a matter of political convenience rather than a genuine acceptance of Roderic as the new king.

According to some Western historians, writing long after the event, there had been very close relations between King Witiza and Count Julian. It is said that Julian's wife was the daughter of Witiza. But there is no evidence of any other special connection between the Governor of Ceuta and the late king which could lead to Julian's alleged treason against Christian Spain and invitation to the Muslims. If Julian felt strongly about Roderic he would hardly have sent his daughter to the new king's court.

Roderic settled down to ruling Spain. Soon after his accession there was trouble in the north-east of the country which called for his presence with the army engaged in action against the enemies of Spain. The Basques had risen again, and there was also an incursion of Prankish tribes into Spanish territory.

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Before Roderic went off to fight on the northeastern frontier there occurred the episode of the enchanted house in Toledo. The story, as told by many historians, is related below, without comment.

There was a house in or near Toledo which was under a spell. It had never been opened. Its door was locked with many locks, each one placed by a Gothic king of Spain. When a king died and a new one was crowned, the caretakers would

take him to the house and there he would place his own lock on the door. The locks were never opened and the house never entered because it was believed that terrible things would happen if that were done. There were 26 locks on the door when Roderic was crowned.

Now the caretakers came to Roderic, told him about the house and asked him to put his lock on the door. "I shall not place a lock on it unless I know what is in it", Roderic replied. "I must open it!"

The custodians of the house were horrified at the king's words. What he proposed would be a sacrilege. "O King", they said, "no one has done that before. Beware of opening it!"

Roderic was adamant. He insisted on opening the door and going into the house. The people thought that he expected to find treasure in the house and offered him all the gold and silver that his heart desired, if only he would leave the house alone. But their pleading was in vain. Nothing could move him from his determination to discover what was inside the mysterious house. The warnings of his nobles that horrors would befall the realm unless he desisted from his rash venture only served to whet his curiosity.

They went to the house. Roderic broke the locks and stepped inside. The house was empty except for a casket with a lock upon it.

He broke this lock also. As he opened the casket he found inside it a scroll of parchment. He unfolded it. On the scroll were drawn pictures of people who looked like Arabs. They were mounted on Arabian steeds, they were armed with swords and had bows slung across their shoulders. In their hands were raised standards.

Above the picture were inscribed these lines:

> When these locks are broken and this house is entered and this casket is opened and the picture in it is exposed, then the people represented in this picture will enter Andalus and conquer it.[1]

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, pp. 247, 251; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 3 ; Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 262.

Roderic was overcome by remorse and sorrow, and so were others present. Some were terrified. Roderic ordered the locks replaced and put sentries on the house. He lived thereafter as a troubled man.

There are other and more elaborate versions of this tale but the sense is much the same. For those who do not ask too many questions, this too was one of the causes of the Muslim invasion of Spain!

*

The social and political conditions that prevailed in Spain under the harsh rule of the Goths will be described in a later chapter. Here it is sufficient to say that they were a brave and barbaric minority ruling without mercy over a large and sullen majority, a good number of their subjects being serfs and slaves. The Goths were Christians, but rent with doctrinal dissension, and even as Christians they behaved in an un-Christian manner.

The Goths were big, strongly-built men, well-versed in the stratagems of war and the use of weapons. They could attack fiercely and defend tenaciously. They were trained to fight as infantry and cavalry and had ample regiments of both, though the cavalry arm predominated. They were certainly not the weakened, softened nation that Count Julian had made them out to be. If some of their warriors were clad in skins it was because they knew no better and had nothing better to wear. They were only a little above the level of savages, while the people over whom they ruled were less barbaric only than their masters.

Some Western writers have painted a picture of weakness and decline in the Visigothic kingdom, accentuated by disunity, suggesting that the Goths were not the men they used to be. This is a view of apologists. It is projected to explain away the defeat of the Christians; in other words, if there had not been this, decline they would not have lost to the Muslims. This has been heard before in Western representation of Muslim history, in relation to the Roman and Persian empires which were humbled by the advance of Muslim armies.

The suggestion is neither correct nor fair. The Visigothic kingdom was a powerful kingdom in terms of military strength. It would be overcome not because of its own weakness but because of the moral and military superiority of those who invaded the land and made them bite the dust.

This then was the situation in Spain on the eve of the Muslim conquest. A rich and beautiful land, abused and exploited for centuries, awaited the arrival of a new people with a new, all-embracing faith who would raise it to heights of culture and prosperity unknown in Europe. Spain was a plum – a ripe plum about to fall into the conqueror's lap. Yet, it would not have fallen but for King Roderic, but for what he did to the innocent daughter of Count Julian of Ceuta, and but for Julian's response to the outrage.

4. THE CROSSING OF THE STRAIT

Tareef's raid took place in July 710 (Ramazan 91 Hijri). After that nine months were to pass before the Muslims launched their major effort. There was much to be done, mainly the preparation of forces, but that did not need nine months. What delayed the invasion was the onset of winter and the absence of a suitable opportunity when Spanish forces would be less readily available to oppose an invasion.

Count Julian appeared loyal, and had indeed given proof of his loyalty. Yet, the Muslims did not have first hand knowledge of Spain and wisely did not take at face value all that Julian said about the weakness of the Goths. Roderic at Toledo could react quickly and forcefully to any threat to his realm, and if the Muslim forces landing on the coast of Spain were not allowed sufficient time to strengthen themselves, they could face disaster. It was wise to wait until Roderic was committed elsewhere.

Meanwhile Musa bin Nusair organised what can more accurately be called an expeditionary force than an invading army. It consisted of 7000 men, mainly foot soldiers, with Tariq bin Ziyad as its commander. It was almost entirely a Berber army, many soldiers being warrior-freedmen like Tariq. There were also some Negroes and a few Arabs in the force, including Mughees the Roman. Another 5000 Berber warriors were available in North Africa, perhaps even more, plus 18,000 Arabs, but Musa held them back. The expeditionary force would consist of just 7000 men.

The plan was for Julian's four vessels to ferry the force from Ceuta to the coast of Spain. Julian himself would accompany the force as guide and to gather information for use by the Muslim commander. The expeditionary force would establish itself on the coast while maintaining communication with Africa. It would raid the countryside, destroy any local Spanish troops encountered and conquer as much territory as possible. The raiding would also be a means of acquiring provisions, because the force would have to live off the land and be independent of supplies from Africa. Further action by the Muslims would depend on the reaction of Toledo. Only after the strength and capabilities of the Gothic army were known, and also how Roderic intended to counter the invasion, would Musa commit the rest of his army and decide upon a clear line of action.

It was a sound plan. To throw a large army across the strait in an unknown land against an unknown enemy who knew the land and was at home in it, especially with a tenuous link of only four boats with its base in North Africa, would be military folly. This was typical of the deliberate thinking and sound judgement of Musa bin Nusair. He was not going to put his forces in a position of danger, or even disadvantage, without a corresponding assurance of success. He looked upon this operation as an exploratory venture, and that is the reason why he made no effort to augment the number of boats available for the crossing, as he was to do later.

Tariq, on the other hand, was an entirely different kind of general. Bold and dashing by nature, he was a superb battlefield commander who revelled in the cut and thrust of combat. He sought honour and glory and adventure. He was a passionately devout Muslim who would gladly risk his life for the paradise which awaited the faithful. His force was not large enough to conquer the entire peninsula, but he knew Musa and how Musa's mind worked. He did not complain. He had no doubt that when he needed more forces he would get them.

Tariq's soldiers were equally staunch in their faith. Most of them were new converts to Islam. Most of them had fought against Musa. Many had been taken captive and then released on accepting Islam. Like their commander, they were

warriors – captives – slaves – freedmen warriors. They were fierce tribesmen, brave and hard fighters, accustomed to the rigours of battle and the sight of blood. They exulted in the prospect of the holy war, and if Spain also offered shining visions of plunder, so much the better.

The winter of waiting passed and was followed by the spring of fulfilment. In Spain there was trouble on the north-eastern frontier where some Frankish bands crossed the Pyrenees and entered the region of Vasconia. This agitated the Basques, always ready for agitation, and a general uprising took place in Basque country. It appears that the Franks were assisting the Basques in their perpetual war against the central authority of Spain.

To meet this threat, Roderic marched from Toledo with the bulk of his army for action against the Basques and the Franks. He arrived at Pamplona and was soon fully committed in fighting in the hills and valleys of Vasconia. Count Julian, informed of the situation by his agents, conveyed the intelligence to Musa bin Nusair.

Musa at once sent orders to Tariq to proceed with the expedition to Spain. It was now the beginning of Rajab 92 Hijri (late April 711).

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Tariq's first requirement was a base on the mainland where he would be safe from attack and from which he could raid and gather provisions. The most dominating feature on the south coast of Spain, as seen from Ceuta, was the great mountain of granite described in Chapter 1. It was virtually unattackable. Tariq chose this mountain as his base and the foot of this mountain as the place where he would land.

Tariq would himself cross with the first wave transported by Julian's little flotilla of boats. He would also be the last man to cross. He would go with the first wave, see to the landing and the organisation of the base; having assured himself that all was well, he would return to the African coast; he would supervise the crossing of the remainder of his force and come up again with the last wave. This was the right position for a commander — the place where he was most needed.

Each of Julian's boats could carry 100 men and 25 horses, fewer men if more horses were taken. There were in any case very few horses with the expeditionary force. How many times the boats plied back and forth is not known, but considering that today the motor ferry between the two continental shores takes 1½ hours to effect a crossing, the slow sailing vessels of the early 8th century may have taken twice that time, perhaps six hours for the round trip.

Julian was responsible for the crossing of the expeditionary force. Since his boats were commercial vessels used for commercial traffic, he planned to make the crossing appear as normal everyday movement of vessels and effect the landing so carefully that people in Spain would not be aware that an invading force had landed on their shores. It has even been said that Julian carried but all the ferrying by night, allowing no movement by day, which could also be true.[1]

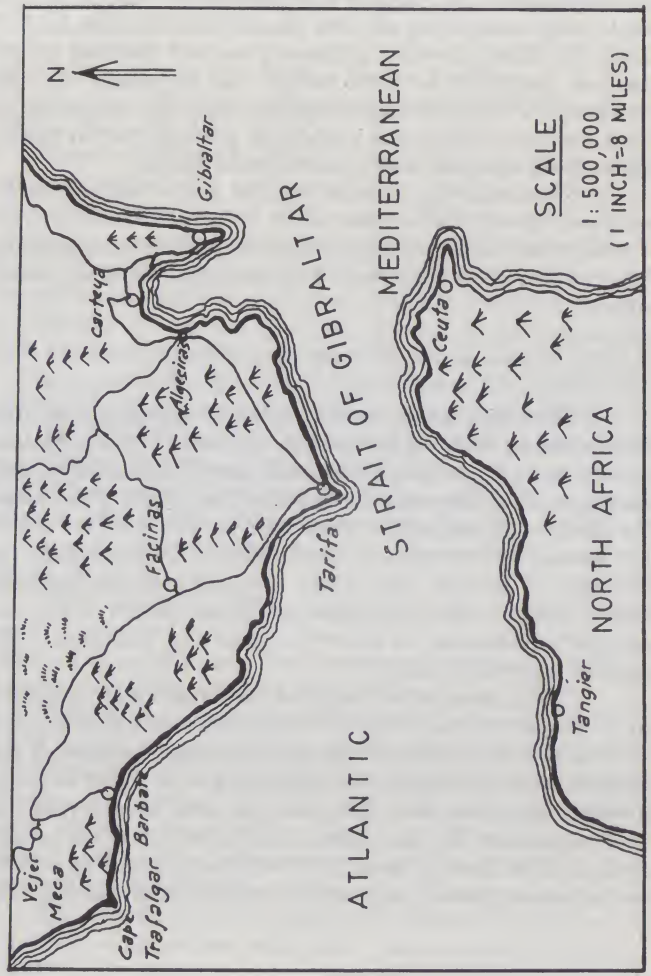
The crossing began on Tuesday, April 28, 711 (Rajab 5, 92 Hijri).[2] Tariq mounted the leading boat. It was a beautiful spring day. A bright sun shone from a cloudless sky upon the blue waters of the strait which connected the Atlantic with the Mediterranean. Across this strait the Muslim warriors standing on the African shore looked eagerly at the rising hills of Spain. The sails billowed in the gentle wind and the boats moved off from the shore, to the rousing cry of *Allaho Akbar* which thundered from thousands of Muslim throats. It was a truly historic moment. Tariq bin Ziyad was on his way, leading a venture which would alter the history of the west.

Some distance from the African shore Tariq fell asleep. Perhaps, like an experienced soldier, he was catching up on his sleep after all the restless nights and days spent in preparing the operation. He slept only for a little while, but during his sleep he dreamed of Prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace!

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1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 6; Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 205.
2. Other dates have also been given: later in the same month, the next month, and the next. Some of the confusion about dates may be due to the fact that the crossing took many days, perhaps two weeks, and the alternative dates given may relate to the completion of the crossing. Some dates may even relate to latter actions of Tariq.

MAP-1 : THE STRAIT



There was the Holy Prophet, surrounded by his companions, all with girt swords and with bows slung across their shoulders. They walked upon the water. They went past the leading vessel and as they passed, the Prophet said to Tariq: "O Tariq, advance upon your course! Be good to the Muslims and loyal to your pledge!" As he passed on, the Prophet gave Tariq tidings of victory. Then the Messenger of Allah and his companions walked on towards the far shore, still walking upon the water, and entered Spain.

Tariq woke up at once, thrilled at the vision that he had seen. He told his soldiers about it and all were delighted at what was clearly a happy omen. It further strengthened their resolve, and Tariq's, who henceforth had no doubt about victory.[1]

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The first wave landed without opposition on the south-western shore of the granite mountain. This mountain already had a name from Phoenician times, Mount Calpe, and was regarded by the ancients as one of the pillars of Hercules. The Muslims disembarked here, prior to occupying the top of the feature, which they promptly named *Jabal Fatah, i.e.* Mountain of Victory. Soon after, it would take the name of *Jabal Tariq* — the Mountain of Tariq, which time has changed to Gibraltar. It is by this name, i.e. Gibraltar, that we shall henceforth call it.[2]

Tariq disembarked with his men and horses and went into a temporary camp while the boats were sent back to fetch more men. The crossing would go on for days because of the manner in which Julian was organising it in order to avoid arousing suspicion. But Tariq lost no time in carrying out reconnaissances. He had chosen the top of Gibraltar as the location of his base in spite of the difficult going. The way to the top was a narrow path with an uneven, stony surface, but

1. Maqqari: vol 1, pp. 231, 240; Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol. 4 p. 214.
2. There are other versions of the landing. Some sources suggest that the landing took place at Algeciras, against opposition, and Tariq had to fight to dislodge the enemy. Most historians, however, narrate the version given in this chapter.

work was begun at once to level the path so that animals could use it.

Several waves of troops assembled at the shore while this work was in progress. At last the path was ready and men and animals went up to the top of the mountain. On the summit of the ridge they built a simple fortification in the form of a stone wall surrounding a large camp, which became known as "the wall of the Arabs"[1]

Count Julian's four vessels continued to labour at their task, plying back and forth across the strait. Muslim warriors continued to land on the coast of Spain and ascend the rock. We do not know how long Tariq's 7000 – strong force took to cross the strait, probably a fortnight or so, but eventually most of it was assembled in the makeshift fortress atop Gibraltar. Some men remained at the foot of the rock to protect the landing point and maintain communication with the African coast. At the end of Rajeb (about the middle of May) all of Tariq's men were in Spain and ready for battle.

As soon as the last wave of Tariq's force had left Ceuta, Julian too crossed the strait. He did not come to Gibraltar but went to Algeciras with his men and sent out agents to collect information about what Roderic and his Goths were doing. He would remain at Algeciras until needed by the Muslims.

Once he was safely established in his base, Tariq began to raid the countryside. One of his first actions was to send for an old woman who lived nearby and who would often talk about a man who would conquer Spain.

The woman was brought into the presence of Tariq. She told him of a husband she used to have who could see future events. "He would tell people of a general", the woman said, "who would enter their land and conquer it. He would describe him as a man with a prominent forehead, such as you have, and on his left shoulder would be a black mole covered with hair. If you have such a mole, then you are he".

Tariq bared his left shoulder, and there, for all to see, was a black mole covered with hair, just as the old woman had said![2]

1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 9.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 231; Ibn ul-Aseer: vol. 4, p. 214; Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 47.

When King Roderic marched north to deal with the Franks and the Basques, he left the southern part of Spain in charge of a Gothic Count named Theodomir, son of Ergobado (Tudmir bin Ghabdus to the Muslims). In the normal administration of the kingdom he was governor of the south-eastern province with his capital at Orihuela, near the present Murcia, which did not then exist. He was one of the most distinguished knights of Spain, a brave and cunning soldier, an able and shrewd governor. He was the only Gothic leader later to outwit the Muslims.

Upon hearing of the arrival of a strange people at the southern tip of the peninsula, Count Theodomir marched against them with all the soldiers he could muster. They numbered 1700.[1] By the time he arrived in the vicinity of Gibraltar, Tariq's force was fully prepared for action. It was now the end of Rajab (about mid May or a bit later). Theodomir occupied Carteya, an old Iberian town at the northern curve of the Bay of Algeciras, where the River Guadarranque flows into the sea. The Arabs called the town Cartagena without confusing it with the more famous Cartagena on the south-eastern coast of Spain.[2]

This Gothic force at Carteya barred the way of the Muslims. It would have to be removed. Consequently Tariq sent a strong detachment under Mughees al-Rumi to deal with it. Mughees attacked the Goths and drove them from the town, whereafter the entire Muslim force moved to Carteya while still keeping protective elements at the landing point at the foot of Gibraltar.

Carteya now became the scene of sharp fighting. Theodomir put in a counter attack but was repulsed. Thereafter he kept his men at a respectful distance from Carteya but skirmishing between the two forces went on for three days, during which the Goths were badly mauled and lost hope of gaining any ground against the invaders. Theodomir now broke contact, to lick his wounds, and Tariq moved his force south to Algeciras, where Julian awaited him.

1. Conde: vol. 1, p. 55.
2. In later centuries even the Spaniards would call this place "Torre de Cartagena", i.e. Tower of Cartagena.

Algeciras was then only a small port-town. The Muslims gave it the name of Jazeerat-ul-Khazra, i.e. the Green Island, which in due course became Algeciras. The name was originally taken from a small islet in the bay which is even now called "Isla Verde" (green island) by the Spaniards. The Muslims also called it Umm Hakeem after a slavegirl of Tariq who was left behind here when the Muslims moved on to fight the main Gothic army, but this name lost to Jazeerat-ul-Khazra, or Algeciras.

The Muslims established their main base at Algeciras, which could keep touch with the African coast by Julian's flotilla of four vessels. It was an excellent base. It was also a most agreeable place which had in it "the best of the land and the sea".[1]

Meanwhile Count Theodomir, having despaired of dislodging the Muslims or even containing them, sent a fast messenger to King Roderic with a letter informing him of the arrival of a strange people in their land. He explained that he had resisted with all his power and done his utmost to stem their advance, but was compelled to yield to their numbers and the impetuousity of their attack. He entreated the King to come in person with all speed and with all the force that he could muster. At a loss to explain how the invaders had got there, Theodomir concluded with the lament: "We know not whether they fell from heaven or sprang from the earth!"[2]

1. Abul Fida: p. 173.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 240; Conde: p. 55; Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 268.

5. THE MOVE TO BATTLE

Roderic had no doubts about where the invading force had come from. He did not for a moment believe that it had fallen from heaven or sprung from the earth. Africa was the only place it could come from and the Gothic King rightly guessed that Count Julian was behind the operation. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

Roderic was distressed by the intelligence conveyed by Count Theodomir. Here was an enemy knocking at his backdoor—an enemy unknown and potentially more dangerous—while he was engaged frontally by other enemies in the Basque country. He took the right decision: he would disengage with his northern foes and let them wait until he had dealt with the southern ones. He would return later to settle accounts with the Basques and the Franks.

Having broken contact with his unruly northern subjects, the King marched south with an army whose strength has been exaggerated by reports to a hundred thousand. He made for Cordoba. But in order to stop the invaders from acquiring more territory and spreading alarm and despondency among his subjects, he sent a large cavalry detachment to deal with them. This body of horsemen moved with all speed to Cordoba under a nephew of the king named Bencio.[1] From Cordoba Bencio continued his southward move to contact the invaders, on the way picking up scattered elements of Theodomir's force which had tried unsuccessfully

1. "Banj" to the Arab writers. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 8; Saavedra: p. 66.

to contain Tariq at Carteya. It is believed that Count Theodomir also joined this detachment which has been described as "the flower of Gothic Cavalry[1]."

Meanwhile Muslim columns were riding far and wide, intimidating the local population and gathering food and fodder. They were to live off the land and were doing it very well. The frightened natives let the Muslims have their way, which is just what the Muslims wanted. They raided deep into the districts of Algeciras and Sidonia. And while Muslim foraging parties were out bringing in cattle and sheep, Julian's agents were out bringing in information about Gothic reactions.

The first contact between the Muslims and the Gothic cavalry took place in the district of Sidonia. The Muslims fell back towards Algeciras. Bencio came on and engaged the Muslims, dividing his cavalry group into several squadrons. A series of bloody clashes followed in all of which the Muslims got the better of their enemies. Bencio was killed in one of these clashes, as well as another officer named Enecon or Edico.[2] Theodomir got away and was to live to fight another day.

After a few days of confused fighting the Gothic cavalry was driven off and withdrew northwards, but not before losing a large number of horses and men. The horses were a welcome addition to Muslim strength and mobility because they had come with few. As the Goths scattered they were pursued by the Muslims for several days. One report says that the Muslims went after them as far as Cordoba[3], but this is probably an exxaggeration. Tariq now resumed his raids with even greater vigour, achieving even greater success. The Muslims dominated the countryside in this southern corner of Spain.

Tariq also shifted his base. He moved from Algeciras along the coastal route and established a new base at Tareefa. He was not yet informed of Roderick's move from Pamplona and was considering an attack on Cordoba, which after Toledo was the most important city in Spain. He moved to Tareefa in

1. Conde: vol. 1, p. 55.
2. Gibbon: vol. 5, p. 559.
3. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 206.

order to place the Muslims nearer this objective while maintaining direct and close communication with North Africa. However, before Tariq could seriously undertake the venture against Cordoba, he was given the alarming news that a hundred thousand Goths were marching against him. It was now the month of Shaban 92 Hijri (May – June 711).

*

King Roderic marched from Cordoba. He had to worry not only about the invaders but also about his own kind. The sons of the late King Witiza were far from reconciled to his assumption of power. They felt that they had a better right to the throne than Roderic, and this feeling was shared by a sizable body of dissidents who threw in their lot with Witiza's sons, Olmondo and Ardabasto. The princes were in Galicia, where they had under their command a considerable element of the Gothic army.

Roderic wrote to the princes. He called upon them to join him so that they could put up a united front against the common enemy and warned them against harbouring private feuds which would create disunity and weaken their resolve. Roderic wrote also to the governors of several provinces and summoned them to Cordoba with the forces at their disposal.

Contingents came in from the provinces. So did the stragglers from the cavalry detachment of the late Bencio. So did the sons of Witiza with their military followers who apparently were sufficient in number to form two divisions of the army. But the princes did not trust Roderic; they were not going to put themselves at his mercy. They camped at Secunda, south of the River Guadalquivir, on the opposite bank from the city of Cordoba, and waited here until it was time to go. When Roderic came out of the city with the bulk of his army to march south, they joined the army.

The disaffection of the princes encouraged a similar sentiment in a large number of Gothic nobles. They were a minority, but not an insignificant one. These Gothic chiefs talked among themselves about the coming of the Muslims as a Godsent opportunity to overthrow Roderic and be rid of him. They did not regard the Muslims as a serious threat to the realm. And this is what they said to one another:

> This wretch has taken possession of our throne. He is not from the family of kings but is only one of our followers. We are not going to let ourselves be destroyed by madness and strife caused by his actions.
>
> As for these people who have come, they have no need to settle in our land. All they want is to fill their hands with plunder, and then they will go back.
>
> So when we meet the enemy let us be defeated along with this son of a wicked woman. Perhaps they will hand power to us; and when they have gone we will place on the throne one who is deserving of it.[1]

*

At Tareefa, Tariq heard of the advance of the Gothic army of a hundred thousand men. Now there was no question of continuing an offensive into the country; the Muslims would hardly be able to hold on to the coast of Spain against such odds. But the invasion had to go on. Tariq was not the man to go in like a lion and come out like a mouse. Consequently, he wrote to Musa bin Nusair, informing him of the march of Roderic and the reported strength of Roderic's army. He explained that he was not able with his present strength to stand up to such a vast army, and he asked for help.

The response of Musa to this request for help is not easy to understand. Knowing the enemy's strength one would expect that he would move in person with the rest of the army and take command in Spain. He had 18,000 Arab troops with him, in addition to 5000 Berber warriors who had been part of Tariq's command at Tangier. Musa had wisely had a large number of boats constructed at Ceuta so that he would not depend for communication between the two continents on the slender thread of Julian's four vessels. But he did not go in person to Spain, nor did he send the bulk of the army to engage in a decisive battle against the Gothic power. He just sent 5000 Berbers across the strait to reinforce Tariq. This contingent moved under Tareef, the Berber chief who had led

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 232; Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 270.

the first Muslim raid into Spain during the preceding year and given the name of Tareefa to the place where he landed.

Musa was too sound a strategist to err in a matter of such magnitude. He was not the man to make silly mistakes or to avoid battle. He probably intended to let Tariq engage the Goths with his own Berber army. He was not likely to win against such odds, but the Goths, even in winning a victory, would suffer such terrible damage at the hands of the fierce Berbers that they would not be in a fit state to fight another battle for some time to come. Musa would then cross over with his larger army, bring the Goths to battle before they could recover and inflict a crushing defeat upon them. It was a clever, if ungenerous, strategy. Musa, the Muslim, would not have done it; but Musa, the Arab, did. He knew his Berbers, and he knew Tariq.

So the Berbers under Tareef crossed the strait and joined Tariq, bringing his strength to 12,000 men. It was an almost entirely Berber army, with a few Arabs and a few Negro troops in it. To this Berber army was due the greatest glory in the conquest of Spain. Yet, they came not as Berbers but as Muslims—devout and fearless holy warriors out to conquer the world for Islam.

Tariq himself now acted as a devout and fearless holy warrior. Once his Berber reinforcements had landed on the shores of Spain, he had all the boats set on fire. The newly built ships of Musa bin Nusair as well as the four old ferry boats of Count Julian went up in flames. There would be no going back from Spain.

Historians have not said exactly where and exactly when Tariq burnt his boats. It could not have been at Gibraltar where he landed because he did not then face any great threat and there was nothing desperate about the situation. It could have been at Algeciras, and it is possible that the reinforcement joined him at Algeciras, whither Tariq had moved from Gibraltar before going on to Tareefa. It is more likely, however, to have been at Tareefa where he stayed awhile before moving inland. We know from Ibn Khaldun that Tareef landed at Tareefa with a large force, not during his earlier raid but as part of the main invasion.[1]

1. Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p. 254.

Regardless of where and when he burnt his boats, this was an act of glorious heroism which has brightened the pages of history for thirteen centuries. It was Tariq's challenge to fate, a gesture of total devotion and gallantry which was to act as a beacon for brave men of all ages and all races. It would become exiomatic in all languages of the human race, a byword for desperate courage, a signal of unflinching dedication to the cause and readiness to die for that cause whenever strong men faced other strong men in mortal combat with boats behind them, burnt or unburnt. Many heroes would henceforth, knowingly or unknowingly, follow Tariq's example and destroy all possibility of retreat in the face of the enemy. But the first man to burn his boats was Tariq bin Ziyad, the Muslim holy warrior.

Iqbal, the Poet of the East, has fancifully but not illogically put into the mouth of Tariq the words: "Every land is our land because it is the property of our Lord!"

Some later historians have cast uncharitable aspersions on this act of heroism. Some have said that it probably never happened. Others have added disparagingly that there were only four boats; and what are four boats! We have the evidence of several historians that the event did take place.[1] Not every historian need relate an event before we accept it as historical fact.

As for the number of boats, it is known that Musa had many constructed after the first passage of the Muslims to Gibraltar[2]. So there were many boats for Tariq to destroy in his fanatical zeal for victory or martyrdom. And if there were only four, it should not be forgotten that if four vessels were sufficient to transport 12,000 men to the coast of Spain, they were sufficient to take them back to the coast of North Africa. The actual number of boats is not relevant. Tariq destroyed his entire transport fleet!

Having reduced his transport fleet to ashes, Tariq struck camp and marched in the direction of Medina Sidonia. At first he advanced along the coast, then turned inland, and after moving five miles stopped at the Pass of Facinas. Here

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 258; Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 46; Saavedra: p. 65; Conde: p. 54.

2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 232.

the hilly coastal region gave place to open country which formed the basin of the River Barbate. The Pass of Facinas was ideal for defence, restricting manoeuvre and nullifying the advantage of superior members. Here the Muslims pitched their tents, taking full advantage of the hilly terrain.

Tariq's light troops fanned out in the open country to the north and north-west, covering the approaches from Medina Sidonia. While his scouts waited for contact with the advancing Goths, Julian's agents probed deeper to discover the intentions and movements of King Roderic's forces.

It was now about the very end of June 711 (early Ramazan 92 Hijri).

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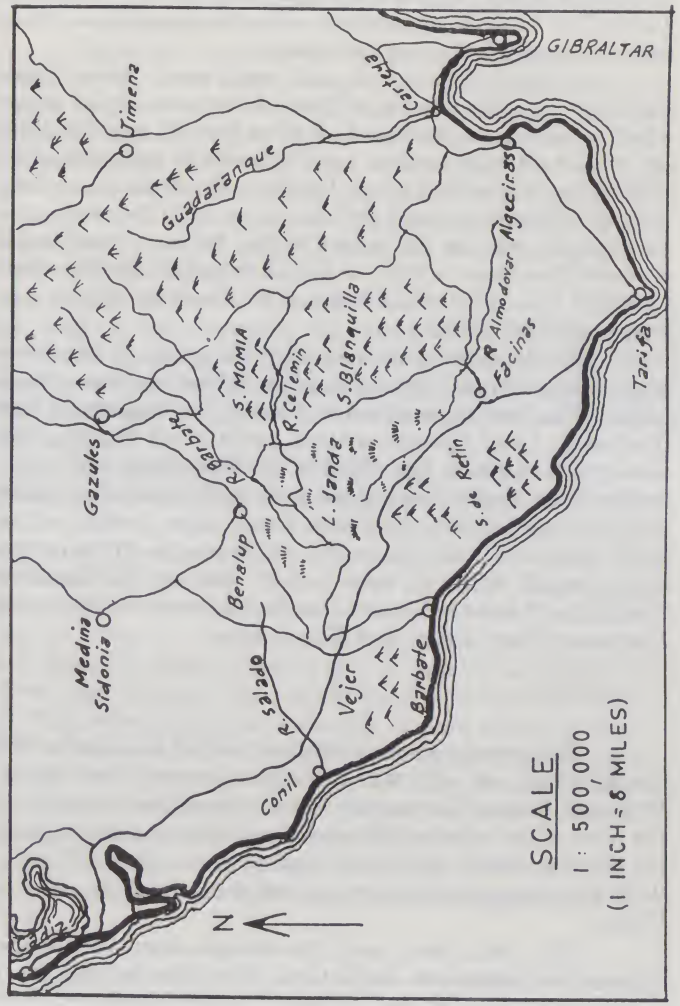
The coastal zone west of Algeciras, up to Cadiz, is hilly. North of this coastal zone lies the district of Medina Sidonia—a large, fertile plain watered by several rivers, the largest of which is the Rio (River) Barbate. This river, fed by a number of tributaries, creates in the southern part of the plain a region of lakes and marshes into which some other rivers also flow. The Barbate itself becomes the main drainage channel in these marshes and empties its waters into the Atlantic by the town of Barbate de Franco.

The largest part of these marches comprises the extensive Lagoon of Janda, through which the Barbate picks its slow and muddy course. To the west, separating it from the sea, is the Sierra de Retin; to the east its boundary is marked by several hill ranges. The Barbate flows around the Sierra de Retin to Vejer de la Frontera, then bends back to Barbate de Franco.

At the present time the flow and floods of the Barbate have been controlled by a system of dams and canals so that much of the marshy area has been drained and the land reclaimed for farming.[1] But at the time of this history most of the flat area lying south of Benalup de Sidonia, north of the Sierra de Retin and west of the hills comprising the Sierra

1. This system was constructed only recently, in the 1960s, by Don Jose Ramon Mora-Figueroa D'Allime, who owns a large part of the land formerly covered by the Lagoon of Janda. His son, Fernando, was the writer's host and guide during his visit to the battlefield.

MAP-2 : LAGOON OF JANDA



Momia and the Siera Blanquilla, was one great marsh separated by only narrow strips of land from the foothills to its south and east. This whole marshy area was the Lagoon of Janda. The River Barbate itself, unlike its present condition, had swampy borders along its banks.

A little farther to the south-west, from Cape Trafalgar, rise the Heights of Meca, a triangle-shaped range which overlooks the Barbate as it flows into the sea. The hills are named after an ancient town believed to have ceased to exist before the arrival of the Muslims, but which, according to local inhabitants, may have been Vejer de la Frontera, also an ancient town, on the banks of the Barbate. The Arabs rendered this Meca as Beca, or Bakka, which is also the name by which the Arabs called Vejer de la Frontera. Bakka was later also called Lakka.[1]

The Muslims gave the name of the hills to the river which flowed beneath them and called it Wadi Bakka or Wadi Lakka. This was transmitted to Spanish as Guadabeca and Guadaleca. Later Spanish writers, perhaps not knowing the connection between the Heights of Meca and the river, confused the Arabic name of the river with Guadalete, which flows into the Atlantic by Cadiz, thirty miles farther to the west. Because of this, the battle which was fought here has been wrongly named in some history books as the Battle of Guadalete. It was the Battle of the Rio Barbate, named by the Muslims as Wadi Bakka and Wadi Lakka.

*

The next move was by Roderic. He did not wait for the concentration of all the Christian warriors of Spain. Moreover, because he was in a hurry to meet the invaders, he left most of his infantry behind and set off from Cordoba with his cavalry, which itself amounted to a considerable army. With him marched the elements commanded by the sons of Witiza.

The army went past the ancient town of Medina Sidonia and advanced deeper into the plain of the River

2. This may have been, literally, a slip of the pen, because when written in Arabic a dot dropped from *Bakka* makes it *Lakka*.

Barbate. It arrived near the town of Casas Viejas (now Benalup de Sidonia) and by the bank of the river pitched its tents. Roderic would wait here until he knew more about the location, strength and intentions of the Muslims.

Tariq was immediately informed of the arrival of the Goths by his scouts who also gave him a description of the ground in the area where the Goths were camped. Then he moved forward. He took the road which ran along the foothills in the direction of Casas Viejas. A few miles short of that town he crossed the River Celemin and went into camp facing west, with the Celemin on his left and the foothills of the Sierra Momia on his right. Farther to his left began the marshes of the Lagoon of Janda.

Upon the arrival of the Muslims in their camp Roderic also took a step forward. He crossed the Barbate and established his camp on the east bank of the river. The two armies were now within sight of each other; the next move would be into battle. This confrontation took place in mid July.[1]

The critical student of war might wonder why Tariq moved at all to this location, giving up the security of the hills and nearness to the coast and coming into relatively open country. The observation is entirely valid. With his predominantly infantry force, faced by a predominantly cavalry army many times more numerous, it would have been safer for Tariq to remain at the Pass of Facinas. There he could beat off Gothic attacks with a greater assurance of success and survival. This would have been more sensible. But Tariq was not here as a sensible general worrying about defence and survival. He was here as a conqueror seeking not to avoid battle but to force it, to defeat the enemies of Allah and go on to conquer the whole of Spain for Islam. Hence the burning of the boats and the forward move.

The only event which remains to describe before battle was the attempt by Roderic to find out more about the

1. Historians are vague about the location of the battlefield, calling it variously Wadi Bakka, Sidonia, Wadi Lakka. Those way out have placed it at Guadalete and even the plain of Jerez. The one historian who has given a detailed location is the Spanish Saavedra. The last-mentioned is accepted by this writer as accurate and sensible.

Muslims. He instructed one of his officers, a brave and true knight, to go into the Muslim camp, carry out a reconnaissance and assess the enemy's strength and condition.

This Gothic officer did as he had been ordered. According to some accounts he was spotted by the Muslims as he was observing their camp from a vantage point and was promptly chased away. According to others the Muslims let him into the camp to see whatever he wished to see. In fact, Tariq treated him as an honoured guest and made him stay for dinner.[1] He does appear to have discovered more about the Muslims than could have been seen from a vantage point outside the camp.

He returned to make his report to the King: "A people have come to you as was revealed in the casket." The reference here is to the picture seen by Roderic in the enchanted house at Toledo, and the words have probably been added by writers who believed in the legend. The knight continued, "Beware of them! Among them are those who seek nothing but death, or to conquer what lies under your feet. They have burned their boats so that none may think of saving himself by their means. They have strengthened themselves by the knowledge that there is no place in our land for them to flee."[2]

The report of the knight did nothing to reassure King Roderic or calm his fears.

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 47.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 258; Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 274.

6. THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER BARBATE

In the confined space between the Lagoon of Janda and the foothills of the Sierra Momia the Gothic army of 40,000 men prepared for battle. Its strength has been exaggerated by some Muslim and Christian historians to 90,000 and 100,000,[1] while one Christian source has reduced it to a mere 25,000.[2] We get the correct figure of 40,000 from Ibn Khaldun.[3] It was a mainly cavalry force, because cavalry was the dominant arm of the Goths; and it was largely a force of Visigoths but with many Hispano-Romans of inferior status.

It was a well-armed force. The better class of soldiers wore armour and there were enough of these armoured warriors to form the forward ranks of the army. The soldiers were armed with swords, lances and bows, with shields for defence. In addition to these conventional weapons many carried the heavy and much-feared German battle-axe, which was not easy to parry.

But if in armament the Goths were terrible, in appearance they were otherwise. The knights were dressed in all their finery—silk and brocade with precious stones adorning their robes and weapons. Above their heads fluttered what looked like a forest of standards, giving the impression of a festive military parade. The status of every

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 231; Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 47, Gibbon: vol. 5, p. 560; Levi-Provencal: p. 13.
2. Saavedra: 67; Hitti: p. 494.
3. Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p. 254.

individual was known by his ring: knights wore gold rings, other soldiers silver, while followers and slaves wore copper on their fingers. It was by these symbols, among others, that the Muslims were to know, after battle, the quality of the fallen Christians.

The brightest in appearance, if not in spirit, was King Roderic himself. He wore a diadem of pearls and a purple mantle bordered with gold embroidery covered his shoulders. The rest of his royal robes were studded with pearls and precious stones. The king was displaying all his regal accoutrements down to his sandals which were worked in silver and carried their share of pearls and sapphires. His hands were encased in long felt gloves.

The King took his place in the centre of his army, sitting on what looked like a throne in a chariot (not a fighting chariot) drawn by two mules. Above his head stretched a silken awning to shade him from the midsummer sun. But he was not confined to his chariot. Beside the chariot a groom kept the King's charger in readiness — a beautiful white horse named "Orelia". And some distance behind the chariot stood many mules loaded with ropes which, the Goths hoped, they would use to bind the captives they were sure to take.[1]

Roderic organised his army for battle according to the conventional pattern with a powerful centre and two wings. The leading ranks were all cavalry, whose task it would be to assault and break the enemy front with shock action — a typical Visigothic manoeuvre. The King also maintained a sizable reserve located behind his centre, for use as required in battle, while in front of him was positioned a strong bodyguard for his personal protection. The wings were formed of the divisions of the sons of the late King Witiza and were commanded by those princes. These troops were no less disaffected and reluctant than their princely commanders. They had treachery in their hearts, though they did not see it as treachery.

There is some confusion about the princes and whether they were in fact the commanders of the wings. Muslim historians have said that it was the sons of Witiza

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 47.

who commanded the wings and call them Almund (Olmondo) and Artabas (Ardabasto). According to Spanish sources the sons of Witiza who commanded the wings were Sisberto and Abba (Oppas).[1] Yet another Spanish historian maintains that Sisberto, who commanded the right wing, and Oppas, who commanded the left wing, were brothers of the late king and uncles of the princes; that the princes were too young to command large divisions of the army and were actually absent from battle.[2] Oppas, archbishop of Toledo and Seville, was indeed the brother of Witiza. However, in order to accommodate the differing versions, it is assumed that the princes were in fact the commanders of the wings with their uncles present beside them. The point is not a vitally important one.

The general effect produced by the army of Spain, with its brightly-clad and heavily-armed soldiers mounted on their big, heavy horses, with banners flying and drums beating, was a very imposing one. To Tariq and his men the Goths appeared "like an agitated sea."[3]

*

Tariq and his men were not overawed. For several months, advised by Julian about Gothic tactics, Tariq had trained his soldiers to fight in close, compact formations suitable for war against the Goths.[4] This was not in the nature of Berbers who were used to a hit-and-run type of warfare, but they learned fast. Most of the men were veterans of campaigns fought against the Muslim Arabs. Most of the men would fight as infantry because there were only a few horses in Tariq's army. Numerically they were less than 1 to 3 of the enemy, but they had the priceless qualities of toughness and valour and a natural inclination to martial life, unspoilt by good living.

It was a formidable army that Tariq commanded : 12,000 Muslims, mainly Berbers, with a few Arabs but several Arab officers like Mughees al-Rumi, Alqama and

1. Sanchez-Albornoz: vol. 1, p. 48.
2. Savvedra: p. 72.
3. Conde: vol. 1. p. 56.
4. Saavedra (p.71) has even said that Julian trained Tariq's soldiers.

Abdul Malik. The noted Berber officers in the army included Tareef and a colourful chieftain named Usman bin Abi Nis'a (Munuza) who was to play a prominent role in Spanish history in later years.

There were also some Negro soldiers in the army. Their numbers have not been given, but from the part played by them in battle and the fact that they were used as a regiment, they would have been numbered in hundreds. The blacks were from the Sudan. This name, meaning "the land of blacks", did not signify the Sudan of today. It was used by the Arabs for the entire black belt of Africa stretching from south of Egypt to the southern part of the present Mauritania, i.e. south of the present Arabic-speaking zone of Africa and including the present Sudan. These black soldiers were culturally less advanced than the Arabs, but as Muslims they were as pure and devout as any, and braver than most.

Tariq had chosen his position with great skill. His army was mainly an infantry army, more solid in battle but lacking the capacity of fast manoeuvre. So he deployed it on a confined front of a little over two miles between the Lagoon of Janda and the hills. His right flank rested on the foothills and his left on the River Celemin, beyond which lay the marsh.[1]

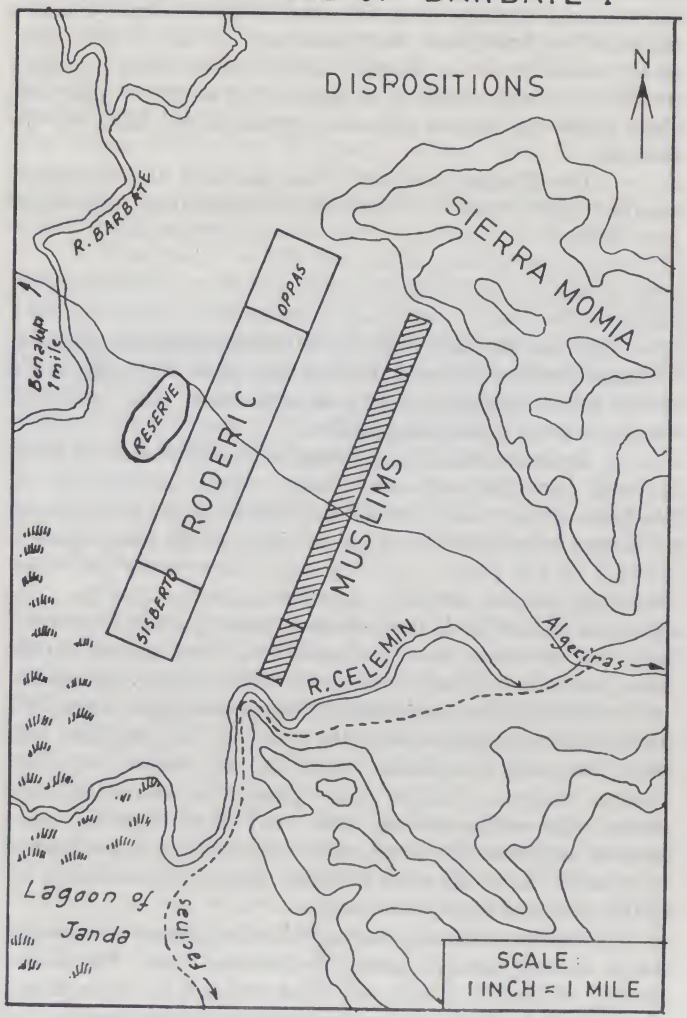
The battle would have to be a frontal one. This deprived the Goths of the benefit of mobility which they would hope to enjoy with all their cavalry. They were now denied room for manoeuvre, because neither the marshes nor the heavily wooded hills permitted free and easy movement by large bodies of cavalry. The Goths would be unable to develop their full power, unable to carry out fast manoeuvres against the Muslim flanks. They would have to fight as Tariq wished; and Tariq had prepared his men to face frontal mounted attacks by the enemy, in close, compact units.

We do not know the pattern of Tariq's deployment, nor who commanded what part of the army. He probably deployed in the normal pattern of a centre and wings, but because of his numerical inferiority he had nothing in reserve. He placed his black troops in the front rank of the centre. He would remain on the defensive to receive and wear down his

1. The left flank of the Muslim army was on ground which is now under the water of a lake formed by a dam recently constructed on the Celemin, a mile downstream.

more mobile enemy, going on to the offensive only when the enemy had been seriously weakened.

MAP-3 : BATTLE OF BARBATE-I



The Muslims awaited the start of battle in a mood of grim determination. They knew that it would be a bitter and bloody contest against a vastly superior enemy. They knew that there were no boats to carry them back to safety; that there was no getting away from the battlefield; that it was a fight to the finish and they must win or die. If they won, Spain would be theirs, another land won for Islam — with a great deal of booty falling to their lot. If they lost and died, they would go to the paradise promised by Allah to the faithful.

The Muslims looked at the splendid Gothic legions arrayed against them. They had no doubt that they would beat them.

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It was Monday, July 19, 711 (Muharram 28, 92 Hijri). The day dawned cool and fresh with a clear, blue sky, but it would get unpleasantly hot by the afternoon. This day would see the start of a weeklong conflict.

Roderic decided to initiate action. The onus of battle lay with him. Either he must fight a battle and destroy the Muslims or they would remain indefinitely in his realm. Room for action was limited and his cavalry did not have space to develop its full power, but they would have to do their best. The King did not intend a decisive action on this day. The Goths advanced with their massed cavalry along the whole front, but this was more of a probe to get the measure of the enemy and discover any weakness which could be exploited.

Soon battle was joined. It began with light actions but increased in severity as the day wore on. The Muslims held their own and the Goths could find no weakness in the Muslim defence. Neither side gained an advantage and neither side suffered much. This went on till nightfall when Roderic withdrew his troops from contact and reestablished his position as at the start of battle. Most of the work on the Gothic side was done by the centre.

As the next day dawned Roderic threw his cavalry into a furious assault against the Muslim front. The Gothic cavalry, trained to attack and crash through by sheer weight of horse and armour, went into action in high spirits, but

came to a grinding halt against the wall of Muslim defence. The two armies came together with a shock similar to . . . "two mountains dashing against each other."[1]

What followed was a day of horrors. The air was rent by shouts and screams from two great bodies of men as bold warriors struck at their adversaries, bringing down horse and man in a wild melee. The din of battle was increased with the blast of trumpets, the thunder of drums and the clash of hundreds of other instruments. The ground trembled under the tramp of the big European horses. Men fought with consistency in spite of the difference of more than 3 to 1 in strength. The battle which began at dawn went on with unremitting violence and carnage for the rest of the day.

Prodigies of valour were performed by both sides. The Goths attacked with the grim determination typical of their race, straining every nerve to push the enemy back or break through on some part of the front. The Berbers fought with the wild fury of their race and the fanaticism of new converts to Islam. They stood firm as a rock, repulsing every attack, holding on to every inch of ground. There was no break anywhere in the Muslim front. Again no decision was gained, no advantage to either side. At last the coming of darkness put an end to the bloody slaughter. The violent spasm of combat spent itself and the troops disengaged to reoccupy positions as at dawn.

Both armies remained on the battlefield while exhausted men got what rest they could. The Muslims spent the night in prayer, knowing that their ordeal had only just begun and that what lay ahead would be harder still. Fighting would become more bitter and more bloody. But they had confidence in their own strength and courage and in the skill and leadership of their commander. Patiently they awaited the coming of dawn.

The Goths had got nowhere. The warriors had taken heavy losses and the repulse they had suffered at the hands of the Muslims had helped neither their spirits nor their pride. But Roderic had reserves. He would use them to replace losses and augment the forces which had gone through two exhausting days of combat. The next day would see a repeat

1. Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 273.

performance but would end, Roderic hoped, with better results.

The dawn of the third day saw a renewal of the cruel strife. The Gothic cavalry charged once again at a steady Muslim front, but once again the Muslims stood firm under the fierce attacks, giving as well as they took. The front gave no ground. The Goths were surprised at the solid firmness of the Muslim ranks which was quite uncharacteristic of Berber warfare.

The day had begun with fierce fighting and the hard slogging continued without respite. Maimed and mutilated bodies over-spread the earth as the frantic push of the Spanish army met with the stubborn resistance of the Muslim front. Attack after Gothic attack was repulsed; squadron after Gothic squadron thrown back. Men thrust and slashed and stabbed in merciless combat. The two armies went through the pattern of the previous day's fighting, again with heavy loss, again with no decision. Both sides showed courage and steadfastness of which any army would be proud.

Towards the end of the day there was some slight advantage to the Goths but not enough to make a difference. It was nothing that they could immediately exploit; and it came too late in the day. Again the fighting ceased without victory in sight. With the fall of dusk another pitiless day came to an end and the two armies disengaged for the night.

*

It was a troubled Tariq who went over in his mind the events of the day. The Muslims had given way in places and yielded ground to the Christians. They were being worn down; the difference in numbers had begun to tell. While Roderic could replace his casualties with reserves and replace exhausted men with fresh troops, Tariq could not. The same men had to go on day after day with the seemingly unending nightmare. He noted a certain amount of disorder. His men were showing the effects of fatique. The knowledge that the Christians would come again the next day and that they would again have to go through a day of horror, while they stood on the defensive, which was against the nature of the Berber, was not good for the men. The Muslims were still

brave and bold, but a decline in spirits was clearly discernible.

Tariq decided that he would talk to the men. He rode to various parts of the front, got the men together, and at each place, rising in his stirrups, he addressed his warriors. After praising Allah and beseeching Him for victory, this is what he said :

> O men, where can you fly? Behind you is the sea; before you is the enemy. By Allah, there is nothing for you but faith and perseverance; and these cannot be overcome because they are victorious forces which suffer not from lack of numbers.
>
> Know that you are on this island like unwanted orphans, and an enemy advances against you with an army and weapons and ample provisions while you possess nothing but your swords, nor any provisions except what you can snatch from the hands of your enemies. Banish fear from your hearts!
>
> Lo, I impose no task upon you from which I shrink, nor will I lead you upon a course which endangers life but I shall offer myself first. Whatever I do, do you also. When I attack, you attack; when I stop, you stop. Be like a single body in combat.
>
> As soon as battle is joined I shall attack the tyrant of this nation and either kill him, God willing, or die in the attempt. So attack with me!

Tariq added a few words about the beauty of the daughters of Rome (meaning Spain, of course) and how the Muslims would become the sons-in-law and brothers-in-law of the princes of Spain while at the same time gaining merit with Allah and strengthening His worship in the land.

His words had an electrifying effect. The men forgot their fatigue and their wounds. In the words of a chronicler, the winds of victory began to blow over them.[1] They replied as

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 242.

one man: "We are with you. We will be ahead of you in battle!"[1]

Tariq had hardly ended his tour of the battle front, exhorting his men, when God showed His favour to the Muslims in an unexpected manner. The defection of the faction of Witiza came to a head. The sons of the late king and their followers had had enough of battle. They came to realise that by fighting on they were unwittingly contributing to a victory which would perpetuate the rule over their country of one whom they regarded as a hateful usurper. They decided to act now.

The princes sent agents to the Muslim camp to see Julian and convey through him the following message to the Muslim commander:

> "Roderic is a dog from the dogs of our father, his follower and servant, who usurped the throne after his death".

Further, they offered to desert the Gothic army in the morning with their followers and come over to him. All they wanted in return was his protection and a promise to hand over to them the estates of their father which had been seized by Roderic. These crown lands consisted of 3000 choice farms which were to become known as "the royal portion".[2]

Tariq accepted the conditions. Plans were made to exploit the defection of the Spanish wings when the Muslims launched their decisive, all-destroying attack in the morning.[3]

*

Tariq's plan was a double envelopment combined with a powerful frontal attack. First the Muslim wings would attack the opposing wings and drive them off the battlefield. The Gothic wings would in any case not need much

1. *Ibid:* pp. 240-2; Ibn-ush-Shabat: p. 154; Gayangos: vol. 1, pp. 271-2. There are several versions of Tariq's speech but the sense is the same.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 258; Ibn-ul-Qutya: p. 2.
3. According to some accounts the Gothic wings defected at the start of battle, but most historians agree that the defection was timed to coincide with the Muslim counter attack.

persuasion to abandon the main body of the army, even if they did not come over to the Muslim side. Then the attacking wings would close in on the Gothic flanks while Tariq struck frontally against the main Gothic position. The final phase of battle would be a three-pronged attack from front and flank. The Muslims would be in the same battle formation as before except that the black troops were shifted from the centre to the left, to face the Gothic right. Tariq would himself lead the centre, mounted on his horse and accompanied by a group of picked warriors, also on horseback.

The sun was not yet up on the fourth day of battle when the Muslim wings moved from their positions. The Goths were taken aback by the Muslim initiative because they had not expected it, and it is unusual for infantry to frontally attack a cavalry force. Moreover, this move upset Roderic's preparations for his own attack, which he had hoped would be final and decisive. But the Goths were brave warriors and stood to receive the attack.

As the Muslim wings neared their objectives the Gothic wings turned and bolted. They did not come over to the Muslims, as the princes had promised, they just turned and rode away, leaving the Gothic flanks open. Roderic may have had his suspicions about the loyalty of the sons of Witiza and expected such an event, because he responded very quickly to the new situation by ordering his reserves to take the place of the deserting wings. But the move was late and inadequate and gave only partial cover to the Gothic flanks.

Now Tariq ordered a frontal advance and the main body of the army heaved into action. Soon battle was joined. The Gothic front held but the Gothic reserves attempting to establish new flanks were driven in by the Muslim wings with the result that the Spanish army found itself under attack from front and flank. Yet, the Goths stood their ground.

As the day wore on the fighting became more severe. It increased in intensity until it was even more violent than the fighting of the day before. Muslim assaults became bolder and fiercer. Hundreds of Goths fell under their blows but the centre continued to resist. They struggled desperately to stem the advance of the Berbers, paying heavily in blood for the time gained. For hours the two armies were locked in mortal combat, striking with sword and battle-axe while the air

resounded with the clash of steel. The carnage was fearful on this fourth day of battle. At last the Muslim wings closed in from the flanks as the Muslim centre closed in from the front in the last sanguinary phase of battle.

Tariq wore a coat of mail and had a white turban on his head. His guards were dressed in similar manner. All were armed with swords and lances and bows. Tariq and his guards spurred their horses and made a determined dash for the Gothic centre where Roderic could be seen sitting on his throne on the chariot over-spread with a silken awning. The Muslim group crashed through the guards in front of Roderic and made for the king of the Visigoths. It is said that when Roderic saw them, he exclaimed: "This is the picture we saw in the enchanted house in our realm!" And Tariq shouted: "This is the tyrant of the enemy!"[1]

According to some accounts Tariq charged at Roderic and killed him as he sat on his throne. Most historians, however, discount this and give the more likely version that the king quickly changed to his white horse and galloped away. But more of Roderic later.

With the flight of the king and the death of many of their generals, the resistance of the Goths weakened. As the Muslims struck even harder, a rearward movement began in the Gothic army which became faster as disorder increased. The movement soon deteriorated into a retreat and a general exodus from the battlefield, and this in turn deteriorated into a rout as the Christian front disintegrated. Before long the Goths were in full flight with the Muslims close upon their heels.

"We pursued the fugitives for three days following that of victory," Tariq was later to write to Musa, "without lifting our swords from the necks of the vanquished."[2]

The Goths thought now only of saving themselves from the horror which pursued them. Some escaped into the hills where they could not be easily followed. Most of them fled along the roads and tracks which took off from the battlefield and for three days the Berbers came in close pursuit. The Muslims struck their adversaries down left and

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 242.
2. Conde: vol. 1, p. 58.

battlefield and for three days the Berbers came in close pursuit. The Muslims struck their adversaries down left and right, their swords drinking deep of Gothic blood and turning a once proud Gothic army into a terror-stricken rabble. They had taken a large number of horses which the Goths had ridden into battle, so that now every Muslim was a mounted warrior, which facilitated pursuit, to the dismay of the fleeing Christians.

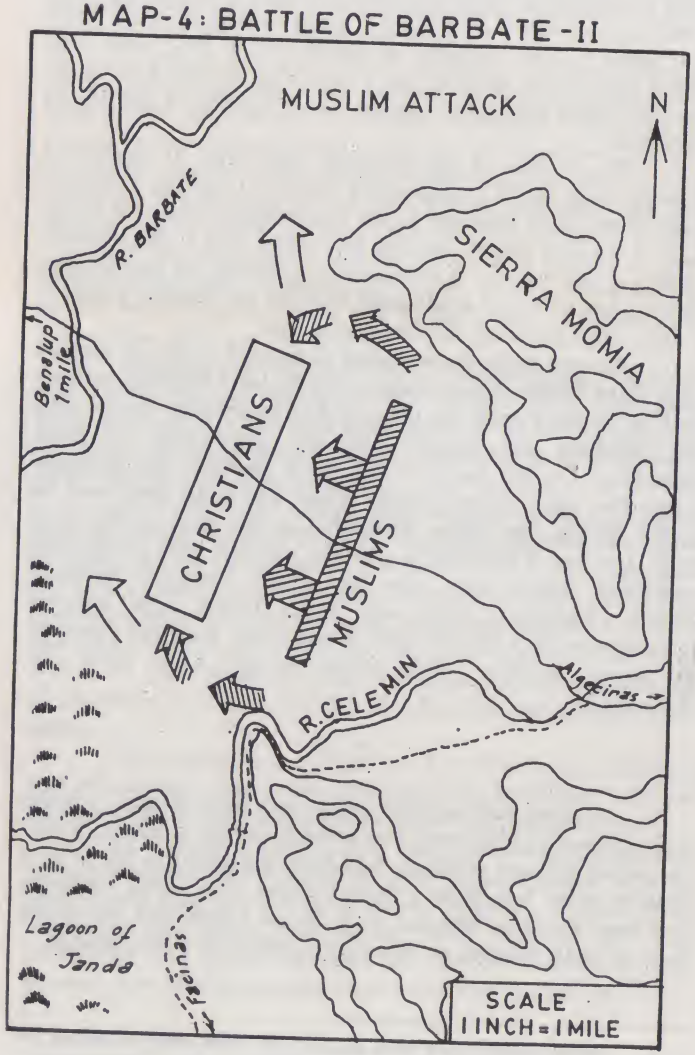
The Battle of the Barbate was over. It ended on Monday, July 26, 911 (Shawwal 5, 92 Hijri), lasting a week of which three days belonged to the first phase, the fourth to the Muslim counter attack and the last three days to the pursuit. Adding a day for the return and re-assembly of the Muslim forces takes us to the traditional Monday-to-Monday duration of eight days given by Muslim historians.[1]

No one quite knows what happened to the ill-starred king of the Goths. Some claims made by later Western writers that he escaped with his life and fought another battle with the Muslims are untrue and are discounted by most historians. On the bank of the River Barbate the Muslims found the white horse Orelia which the king had used in battle. Beside the horse, embedded in the mud of the river bank, lay one of the King's sandals, studded with pearls and sapphires, which was later sold for a hundred thousand dinars.[2] Roderic's body was never found. The general consensus is that he drowned in the river, weighed down by his heavy armour, while trying to get away from the battlefield.

*

A great and terrible battle had been fought; a great and glorious victory won. The powerful army of Spain, led by the ablest general of Spain, had been shattered in battle by a Muslim army less than a third its size. The proud Visigoths had been made to bite the dust. Never before had the Goths been so badly beaten, so thoroughly defeated in fair combat.

1. Some accounts give three days for the main battle, including the Muslim counter attack, but most historians agree with the 8-days duration.
2. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 48; Gayangos: vol. 1, appx. D. p. 48.



This was one of the decisive battles of history, perhaps the most decisive ever fought in Spain. There would be other battles in the peninsula in the blood soaked history of Spain, but never one so bloody, so fiercely contested and so far-reaching on its consequences. It was a stupendous victory for Islam. It marked the beginning of the end of Gothic rule and opened the doors of Spain and Western Europe to Islam.

The plain of the Barbate bore gruesome evidence of the ferocity and carnage of this battle. The earth was covered with broken swords and lances, with broken and torn bodies. An enormous number of Goths had been killed whose bones would lie glistening in the sun for many years. While there is no record of Gothic losses, it is reasonable to assume that their casualties were at least the same in proportion to their strength as those of the Muslims. Thus about a quarter of the army perished in battle, perhaps 10,000 men, most of whom fell in the main battle while others were cut down in the pursuit. Among those killed was Sisberto, brother of King Witiza and commander or second-in-command of the right wing. The Muslims took 10,000 prisoners who, according to the usage of war, became slaves, except for those who accepted Islam, as many of them did in due course.

The Muslims lost a quarter of their strength, 3000 dead, martyrs in the way of Allah, and since the ratio of wounded to killed in battle is usually 3 to 1 and 4 to 1, there must have been few warriors who did not carry wounds on their persons. But a glow of pride warmed their hearts. They had fought and defeated a superior Gothic army in typical, setpiece, Gothic fashion, which was far from the Berber fashion of hit-and-run warfare. The booty collected was immense. After taking out one-fifth of it as the share of the state, Tariq distributed the rest at a scale equivalent to 250 gold dinars per head.

This was a classic battle, following a pattern now well known. A smaller force of infantry, lacking the capability of fast manoeuvre, faced with a much larger and more mobile force, restricting the field of battle to a narrow front and robbing the enemy of its advantage of mobility . . . the smaller infantry force lacking the strength to attack remaining on the defensive to receive the attack of the larger force . . . wearing down the larger force to create conditions for a counter stroke

. . . the smaller infantry force going on to the offensive when the enemy has been weakened and bled in repeated repulses . . . the final attack in the form of a double envelopment combined with a frontal assault. It was a beautiful battle brilliantly conceived, superbly conducted and heroically fought.

In general concept it was similar to the Battle of Cannae fought in 216 BC, at which Hannibal did much the same to the Romans as Tariq did to the Visigoths, with a proportion of strength only slightly better than Tariq's, Cannae has given its name to this type of battle manoeuvre. One could ruminate further on this fine battle but it might be better to let the student of war indulge in the exercise of his own judgement in evaluating this operation.

A good part of the credit for this victory goes to Tariq, whose skilful tactics and bold leadership made it possible. It was under his command that his fearless Berbers planted the flag of Islam on Spanish soil, where it would flutter in joyful pride for eight centuries. It should be noted, however, that they came, fought and conquered not as Berbers but as Muslims, purified and inspired by the new faith.

As soon as the fever of battle had passed, Tariq wrote to Musa bin Nusair. He narrated the course of battle and how they had pursued and slaughtered the Goths; the glorious results gained from the battle including the ample spoils of war. He had the right to expect applause from a grateful Commander-in-Chief.

What he received in reply was a rebuke. Musa warned him against any further advance and ordered him to remain in his present position until he, Musa, had joined him.[1]

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 233; Ibn Izari: vol 2, p. 13; Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p. 254.

7. DEEPER INTO SPAIN

Musa bin Nusair, Governor of Africa and the Maghreb, was also Commander-in-Chief of the theatre, which included Spain. He was responsible for operations on the peninsula. But the knowledge which the Muslims had of Spain, especially its geography, was too limited for the formulation of a grand strategical design of invasion. They knew that it was a very large land; they knew somewhat more about the geographical character of the southern part of Spain opposite North Africa; they knew that the Visigoths were a brave and strong nation. Beyond that they knew little of Spain. Because of this lack of information Musa was unable to prepare a detailed or precise plan of operations. All that was clear was the aim: the conquest of Spain.

Musa's intention in sending Tariq and his Berbers to Spain was to test the power of the Visigoths and discover their strengths and weaknesses. Tariq would clash with the Goths. He would bleed them and prepare them for the final blow which Musa himself would deliver, achieving a great victory in Spain. Tariq and his Berbers would bleed, too, but such is war! This explains why, in response to Tariq's appeal for help when faced by Roderic's large cavalry army, Musa sent him only another 5000 foot soldiers, although he had 18,000 more troops with him in North Africa, including the flower of the Arab cavalry.

But he had no illusions about the danger. When Tariq put his boats to the torch Musa's apprehensions increased sharply. Now, even if he wished, he could not support his

subordinate across the sea, a predicament about which he had been warned by the Caliph. He moved his headquarters to the Maghreb, somewhere near Tangier or Ceuta. Every day he would await news from across the strait and spend many hours in prayer. Then came Tariq's messenger with tidings of victory. Overjoyed and overcome with relief, Musa prostrated himself in prayer and rendered praise unto Allah.

The tension passed. The anxiety ended. When that happened Musa's relief turned to anger and envy. He had sent Tariq to Spain for what he thought would at best be an indecisive engagement. But instead of that Tariq had won a resounding victory which shed lustre on his arms and brought him fame and glory which Musa himself had hoped to win. Moreover, the vast spoils acquired in battle had gone to Tariq and his Berbers instead of being divided amongst all the warriors under Musa's command. This made him extremely angry.

He sent a harsh and abusive letter to Tariq in which he forbade him any further advance. In fact, he ordered him to remain where he was until Musa had joined him.[1]

Having sent Tariq's messenger back with his letter, Musa began to make plans for crossing the strait with an even bigger army than Tariq's and taking on the conquest of the peninsula where Tariq had left off. He was a superb organiser. But he took his time. The summer was ending and it would be better to wait for the following campaigning season before resuming operations. Furthermore, having ordered Tariq not to advance any further, he had no doubt that Tariq would remain by the bank of the River Barbate and await the coming of Musa. In this he was wrong.

*

One of the first things that happened after the battle of the Barbate was that the sons of Witiza turned up at Tariq's headquarters. According to Muslim historians they were Akhila, Olmondo and Artabas. They came to confirm the arrangements which they had made with the Muslims during battle.

1. Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p. 254; Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 233; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 13.

"Are you yourself the commander or is there a commander above you?" they asked Tariq.

"No", Tariq replied, "above me there is a commander and above that commander there is a supreme commander".[1]

The princes then expressed a wish to go to Africa to see Musa bin Nusair and put their case before him. To this Tariq agreed. At their request he gave them a letter in which he spelled out the agreement made with them in the matter of the crown lands owned by their father.

The princes crossed the strait and met Musa, to whom they gave Tariq's letter while they explained their case. Musa reiterated the pledge given by Tariq but said that they would have to go to Damascus to see the Caliph, who was the final authority in such matters.

The princes then travelled to Damascus where they were received by the Caliph with much honour. He confirmed the arrangement made by Tariq. Thereafter they returned to Spain and took possession of the promised lands, each prince getting 1000 farms as his share. Olmondo settled in Seville, Artabas in Cordoba and Akhila in Toledo.

The princes lived in peace and contentment on their estates, enjoying the fruits of their steadfastness and loyalty to the Muslims. After the passage of many years Olmondo died and Artabas forcibly took possession of his late brother's lands. Thereupon Olmondo's daughter, a beautiful and spirited girl named Sara, who was to become known to the Muslims as Al Qutya — the Lady Goth — travelled to Damascus to see the Caliph and demand redress of wrong done her by her uncle. At Damascus she not only received justice but also acquired an Arab husband whom she brought back with her to Spain. But this happened a generation later and is outside the scope of this volume.[2]

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A few days were spent on the battlefield, clearing the wreckage of war. The dead were buried, the wounded were treated, arrangements were made for prisoners and for the

1. Ibn-ul-Qutya: pp. 3-4 ; Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 265.
2. From this Gothic princess was descended the famous Spanish—Arab historian, Ibn-ul-Qutya (son of the Lady Goth).

collection and disposal of the spoils of war. Then there was the meeting with the sons of Witiza and their despatch to North Africa to see Musa bin Nusair.

News of the victory spread rapidly in the Maghreb. More Berber warriors, already converted to Islam, prepared to join the holy war and crossed over to Spain, using anything that could float. By now more boats had been built by Musa and these were used to ferry men and material across the strait. So fresh Berber contingents came to serve under the banner of Tariq, eager for battle and for its fruits. The number of new arrivals is not known but is believed to have been sufficient to make up Tariq's battle losses, which means that he once again had an army of 12,000 men. And this time they were all mounted, on horses taken from the Goths.

The remnants of the army of Spain, broken into pieces on the bank of the Barbate, fled headlong from the scene of operations. Those who were not killed or captured were driven by fear, and seeking only to save themselves, scattered in all directions. They went whereever they thought they would find escape from the horrors of war. They took refuge in the hills and in distant castles, keeping away from the plains of which the Muslim cavalry was now master. Most units in which there was still some order and cohesion went northwards and were able to join other forces not yet committed to battle. They still hoped that this was only a raid on a grand scale, that after collecting a good deal of booty the invaders would go back home.

At the beginning of August 711 (middle of Shawwal 92 Hijri) Tariq set off once again. His objective, as before, was Cordoba. He rightly decided to give the Goths no time to recover from their defeat, to crush the remaining opposition while it was still suffering from the physical and moral shock received at the Barbate. On his way he would eliminate any resistance which might hinder his march. But in order not to get involved in dealing with opposition which was not relevant to his objective, he avoided Medina Sidonia, leaving it on his left, and marched northwards.

The first place where he met enemy soldiers was Moron de la Frontera but they offered no opposition. The garrison surrendered peacefully. After receiving the submission of Moron, Tariq took the road to Cordoba, going

first north and then north-east to approach Ecija from the west.[1]

Ecija was the ancient Astigis, situated on the left bank of the River Genil. It was once a Roman colony and tradition has it that it was visited by Saint Paul during his journeys in Spain. The Muslims called the town Istija and the river Shenil, even Sanjal. It was a fortified town of strategical importance, being a communication centre which controlled movement in several directions. It lay on the main highway between Seville and Cordoba, about 30 miles from the latter. At the time of the Muslim approach it contained a warlike and unsubdued citizenry, strengthened by reinforcements from Cordoba and many fugitives from the Barbate. It was commanded by a Gothic officer known for his vigour, resolution and cunning.[2]

The Muslims got to a spring four miles from Ecija known as Barrancas del Molinillo (Gulley of the Handmill). Tariq set up his camp here, after which it became known as Ain Tariq (Spring of Tariq). From here scouts were sent in the direction of Ecija. These scouts returned to report a large concentration of Gothic warriors in front of the town — an army large enough to promise another hard and bloody battle. It was now about mid August (the latter part of Shawwal).

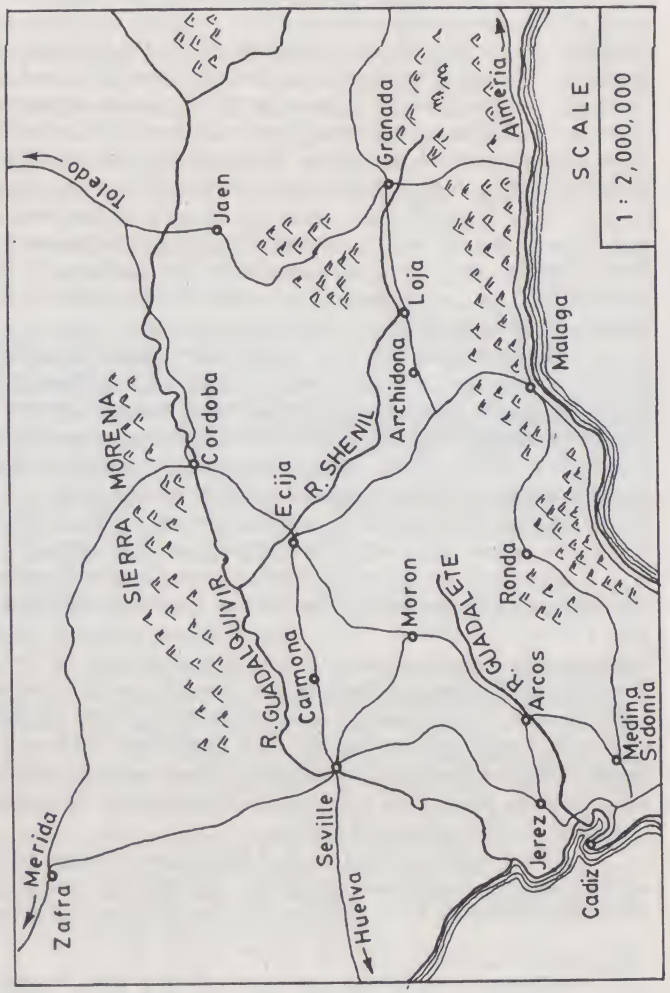
Arraying his troops for battle, Tariq advanced against the Goths. We do not know what course the battle took but it was a fierce contest in which the Muslims suffered heavy losses in killed and wounded. Chroniclers relate that although it was not of the scale of Barbate, this was the second hardest battle fought in Spain and that the encounters which followed were not comparable in ferocity and bloodshed. At last the battle turned in favour of the Muslims. They scored a victory, but it was no more than a limited tactical victory. The Goths retreated in good order to the town.

The Muslims moved up and laid siege to Ecija. While on its eastern side flowed the Genil, the western arc of the town was protected by a high wall. The Muslims had no

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1. According to some accounts Tariq also took Medina Sidonia, Carmona and Seville, but other and more dependable accounts give these objectives to Musa, who is known not to have taken the path trod by Tariq. Moreover, they were off the route of his advance to Cordoba.
2. Maqqari: vol.1, p.260; Gayangos: vol.1, p.275.

MAP 5 : SOUTH–CENTRAL SPAIN



engines to breach the fortifications and the siege went on for some days.[1] It could have gone on indefinitely but for the curious episode of the Gothic commander coming out for a bath in the river.

The Gothic general came out of the town to the river which flowed beneath its eastern wall. He came alone and began to bathe. He was seen by the Muslims. The situation gave an irresistible push to Tariq's adventurous spirit and he too, without knowing the identity of the Goth, went to the same place for a bath. The fact that Tariq was alone and unarmed suggests that the place was right under the wall of the fort and regarded by the defenders as safe from intrusion by an enemy intent on battle. It may have been a well-used bathing point.

Tariq also went in to bathe in the river, beside the Goth. And here we have the incredible spectacle of two opposing commanding generals having a bath together without either of them knowing who the other was. Had the Gothic general suspected that the tall, sinewy Berber splashing in the water next to him was the Muslim army commander, he would have finished his ablutions hurriedly.

Then Tariq pounced upon the Goth. The latter was evidently no match for the Muslim, for Tariq picked him up and hoisting him over his shoulder, made a dash for the Muslim lines, where he arrived safely without interference from the Christian soldiers on the wall. Perhaps he used the Goth as a shield.

Once in the Muslim camp the Goth revealed his identity as the Commanding General of Ecija. Thereupon the Muslims proposed to their distinguished captive an honourable surrender: the Muslims would take the town peacefully, under treaty rather than by violence, in return for payment of the Jizya.[2] The Gothic general accepted the proposal. From the readiness with which the Muslims and the Goths agreed to terms we can assume that both sides had

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1. According to Ibn-ush Shabat (p. 141) it went on for months, but this could not be correct in view of the dates of subsequent events.
2. This was a tax imposed on non-Muslims at the normal rate of two dinars per head per annum, in return for exemption from military service and protection against external enemies. Women and children, the aged and those without visible means of support did not pay this tax.

been badly hurt in battle and glad to arrive at a solution which averted further bloodshed.[1]

Tariq let the Gothic general go. He kept his word. Ecija opened its gates and the garrison surrendered to the Muslims. There was no bloodshed, no pillage, no impost of any kind. The citizens paid the Jizya and were left in peace in possession of their homes and property, free to practise their religion and live their lives as before.

But not all wanted to live their lives as before. These were the Jews. They wanted a change, any change, for nothing could be worse than the brutal oppression which they suffered as a hated religious minority. Now for the first time they came out in open support of the Muslims, threw in their lot with the invaders and offered their services. The Muslims did not need their help because they would take Spain anyway, especially now that the back of Gothic resistance had been broken at the Barbate and Ecija, but out of kindness they took the Jews under their wing, accepting them as followers of Prophet Moses (on whom be peace). A later chapter will describe the reasons for their defection.

Tariq was also joined by a large number of malcontents, a motley crowd of Hispano-Roman inhabitants who were glad to welcome the invaders. They saw the change as a release from bondage and an escape from the harsh servitude which they suffered under Gothic rule. This was of no direct military value to the Muslims, but with the change of heart among the oppressed elements of the people, which meant most of the population, word spread in the peninsula of the kindness and fairness of the conquerors. Everyone in Spain came to know that when Ecija surrendered to the Muslims there was no bloodshed, no bondage, no destruction, that all were safe and free, that all they had to pay was two dinars per head as Jizya. This image, fully deserved, helped the progress of Muslim arms in Spain.

The fears of the Goths and the ruling echelons correspondingly increased. Now little doubt remained about the Muslim invaders. They were obviously not a bunch of

1. One Spanish historian (Saavedra: p.78) discounts this version of Tariq's conquest of Ecija. He says instead that Count Julian talked the Goths into submission. In this narrative the majority view has been followed.

brigands who would burn and pillage and then return to where they came from. They had come to conquer and stay. Now even more Goths fled from the plains to keep out of the way of the Muslim cavalry. Even more of them took refuge in castles away from the main roads to avoid clashing with the Muslims as they advanced deeper into Spain.

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It was at Ecija that Tariq received the rude letter of Musa bin Nusair. Ecija had just opened its gates and plans were being made for the next operation. And now came this order from the Commander-in-Chief forbidding any further advance and ordering Tariq to remain in his present location until the Commander-in-Chief had joined him. The letter did not say when Musa would come but it was obvious that it would be many months before he appeared at the scene.

The student of war will wonder at the military wisdom of Musa's decision to hold Tariq back. At this stage, with the enemy trounced in battle and incapable of serious resistance, and with Spain lying almost defenceless at his feet, for Tariq to press on would be the height of military wisdom. Under certain circumstances a small force can achieve results out of all proportion to its strength, results which would not be possible for a larger force when the situation has altered. Opportunity was knocking now, it would not wait for ever, certainly not for the coming of the Commander-in-Chief. Musa's instructions would achieve nothing more than to give time for the Goths to recover from their defeat, reform and regroup their forces and dispute the Muslim advance with better prospects of success. Then all the Muslim blood shed at the Barbate and at Ecija would be wasted. It is only in the light of what Muslim historians have described as his envy and anger is it possible to understand this direction to Tariq from a man of such towering strategical judgement as Musa bin Nusair.

Luckily for the fate of Islam in Spain, Tariq did not obey Musa's orders. He knew exactly what was in Musa's mind, but like a good soldier and loyal subordinate did not

reveal his thoughts.[1] He called a council of war. When his generals had assembled he read out Musa's letter and asked for opinions.

All present were aghast. They knew the importance of not allowing respite to a defeated enemy, of not letting an enemy on the run stop and recover his breath. The precious moment might not return. The generals made no secret of their disapproval of the untimely restraint being imposed by Musa upon the victorious forces of Islam in Spain.

Then Julian spoke up. As a wise old chief he was heard with respect. "You have shattered the forces of the enemy and they are now panic-stricken", said the Count to Tariq. "Make for their capital, and my skilled guides will lead you to it. Divide your army into several groups to take several directions in the land. Go yourself to Toledo where their leaders are assembling. Prevent the enemy from deliberating upon their affairs and agreeing upon a chief to lead them."[2]

The wisdom of his words was unquestionable. Tariq and his generals would have pressed on even without Julian's counsel, but the presence and advice of the wise and respected Count of Ceuta strengthened their hands and made it easier for them to disregard the instructions of their Commander-in-Chief. The main difference which Julian's advice made to Tariq's plans was that instead of going to Cordoba, as earlier intended, he now picked on Toledo as his main objective. He would bypass Cordoba altogether, leaving it to his colourful Arab subordinate — Mughees the Roman.

1. Conde : p.61.
2. Maqqari : vol.1, p.260; Conde : p.61.

8. THE CONQUEST OF CORDOBA

While keeping the bulk of the army concentrated under his personal command, Tariq created two separate detachments, one of 700 horse under Mughees al-Rumi and the other of unknown but probably equal strength under Zaid bin Qesadi.· The main body under Tariq would march to Toledo; the detachment under Mughees would go to Cordoba; the one under Zaid would operate against Malaga and the south.

The two detachments would engage and mask enemy forces found in their respective objective regions while the main thrust was made against Toledo. They would prevent interference with Tariq's flank and rear and ensure that the Muslims remained in communication with the sea. The coastal zone of southern Spain was the strategical base of the invasion. And if during the course of their operations the two detachments conquered more territory and killed more enemies of Allah, so much the better.[1]

Plans were made, forces regrouped, arrangements finalised for communication and movement. When everybody was set to go, Tariq spoke to his men. He told them not to cause offence to the unarmed and peaceful inhabitants of the land, to attack only those who were armed or actively assisted others who opposed the Muslims, to take nothing in plunder

1. A few Western writers claim that Malaga and Granada were taken later, not as part of this operation. Most historians, however, favour the version given here, which also makes strategical sense.

except what fell to their lot in battle or was taken by force of arms.

With these words Tariq launched the army from Ecija. The main body made for Jaen, whence it would turn north towards Toledo. Mughees al-Rumi marched in the direction of Cordoba. Zaid went south.

*

We will first deal with the relatively minor operations conducted by Zaid bin Qesadi in the southern part of Spain. His objective comprised two districts. The Western one was Rejio with its capital at Archidona but with Malaga on the coast as its largest and most important city. (Malaga was an ancient port built by the Phoenicians). To the east of Rejio lay the district of Elvira, with the town of Elvira as capital of the district. For operations in these two districts Zaid divided his force into two light regiments, each assisted by Julian's guides.

Some historians have spoken of the conquest of Granada by this force, giving as an alternative version the conquest of Granada by Abdul Azeez bin Musa two years later. This is not correct because the city of Granada did not exist at the time. There was the important Roman town of Iliberri, later called Elvira, about ten miles west of the site of Granada, but there was no Granada. The latter was founded in the 9th Century and rose in brilliance and power in the 13th, whereafter Elvira rapidly declined and eventually ceased to exist. Because of their close proximity the two towns have at times been confused with each other and Granada seen as a successor of Elvira. The point that the reader should keep in mind is that the objective of Zaid, among his other objectives was Elvira, not Granada (although on our maps we have shown Granada because it is the more famous of the two).

The regiment earmarked for Malaga marched towards its objective. As the Muslims neared the city, however, the Goths abandoned it and fled into the mountains. The Muslims occupied Malaga and went on to overrun most of the district, including the capital city of Archidona.

The second regiment arrived at Elvira to find the inhabitants unwilling to surrender and invested the town. While this siege was in progress the Muslims were joined by the other regiment which had completed its task of subjugating the district of Rejio. Soon after this the Muslims were able to take Elvira by storm. When the town had fallen the entire detachment under Zaid went on to subdue other towns and fully subjugate the district of Elvira.

In all three big towns of the region—Elvira, Malaga and Archidona—the Muslims were welcomed by the Jews who threw in their lot with the conquerors. It now became common practice with the Muslims, whenever they conquered a city, to appoint Jews to run the administration of the place with a small band of Muslim soldiers to assist in maintaining law and order. When taking a city which had no Jews the Muslims would leave the local administration in the hands of Hispano-Romans, as opposed to Goths, with a larger Muslim garrison to enforce Muslim rule.

Zaid had completed his task. When he had placed the administration of the towns in the hands of the Jews and earmarked small groups of soldiers to assist them, he marched north to join Tariq at Toledo.

*

A brief description of Mughees the Roman has been given in the first chapter of this volume, including his princely Arab origin. During the four months which had elapsed since the Muslims set foot on the soil of Spain, Mughees had always been at the forefront, always in the thick of the fighting. He was respected and admired as much for his tactical skill as for his personal courage. He was loved for the spirit of adventure which animated his personality. And now he was marching with a force of 700 horse for Cordoba. His task was to keep the enemy in Cordoba engaged so that he would not interfere with Tariq's operations against Toledo, but Mughees was not the man to be content with so tame a role.

Cordoba was not then the great metropolis which it was to become later — a centre of light and learning and civic organisation which offered its citizens street lighting and

underground sewerage while Europe wallowed in the mud of the dark ages. Cordoba was then a city of moderate size such as would suit the Romans and the Goths as a provincial capital and such as, with their limited organising ability, the Visigoths could administer. Nevertheless, it was the most important provincial capital in Spain, being at the same time a strategical centre of prime importance.

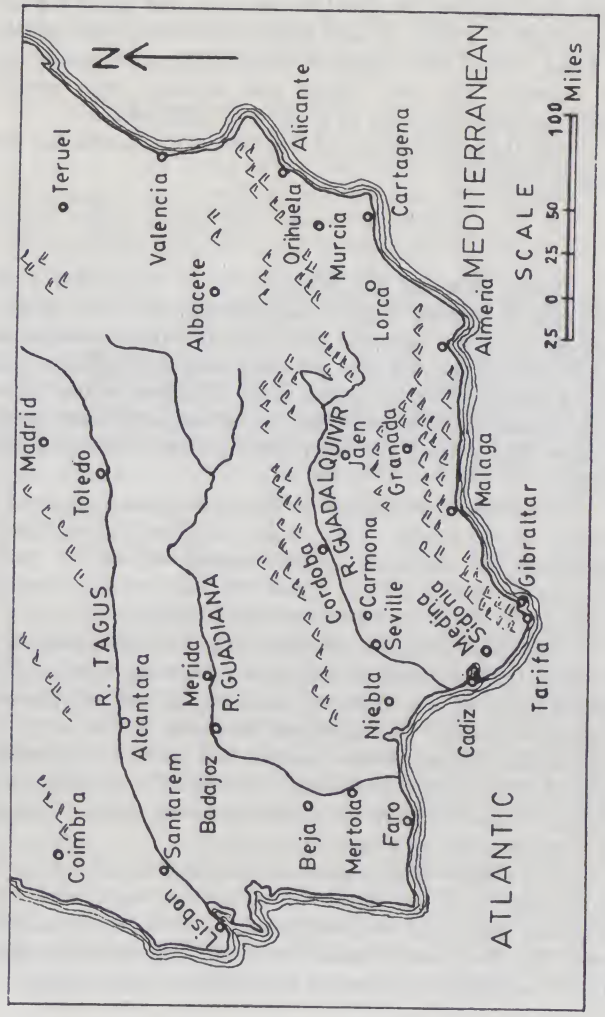
Cordoba was an ancient city, believed to be of Carthaginian origin. In 152 BC the Romans made it the capital of Baetica, the province comprising the entire south of Spain except for the south-western corner of the peninsula which was part of the western province of Lusitania. Ever since then, through the vicissitudes of Roman and Gothic rule over a period spanning nine centuries, it had remained the capital of Baetica. It rested on the north bank of the River Baetica, at a sharp bend in the river. North of the city rose the hills of the Sierra de Cordoba.

The river was called Baetica, as in Roman times. When the Muslims first approached its banks they called it the River Shaqunda, but after they had settled at Cordoba they took to calling it Wadi-ul-Kabeer, i.e. the Great Valley or Great River, which is now rendered in Spanish as Guadalquivir. Since this is the name by which the river is now known, we too will refer to it as Guadalquivir. The name is specific to the river rather than the valley.

Cordoba was a walled city with battlements and towers built originally by the Romans. It was a city of many gates of which the two which concern us in this history are the Gate of the Statue and the Gate of Seville. The former was so called because of a sculptured lion atop the gate.[1] It was also called the Gate of the Bridge because it faced the bridge across the Guadalquivir, and would later become known as the Gate of Algeciras. The Gate of Seville was at the south-western corner of the city. Near it rose a large cathedral which contained the relics of San Acisclo, a saint much venerated by the Cordobans, and because of this it was called the Church of San Acisclo. It was so built that it could be used as a citadel for defence.

1. The Gate of the Lion still stands as a beautiful monument at the northern end of the old Roman bridge, but without the walls into which it was originally built.

MAP 6: SOUTHERN HALF OF SPAIN



On the south bank, in the cradle of a bend in the river, lay the suburb of Secunda (Shaqunda), and south of this stretched a hilly region covered with pine forest. The plain between the foothills and Secunda is now known as *Campo de la Verdad,* i.e. the Field of Truth. A mile south of Secunda, also by the river bank, rested the village of Tercial (Tarsail),[1] while the space between the two places was covered with woods, described in some accounts as a forest of lofty cedars.

Into these woods moved Mughees al-Rumi and his 700 Muslim horsemen.

*

It was now the end of Shawwal 92 Hijri (about the third week of August 711). Having established his camp in the woods between Secunda and Tercial, Mughees sent his scouts to look at the city and get what information they could about its defences. The presence of the Muslims in the woods remained undetected because the Goths had withdrawn to the city, after dismantling the old Roman bridge which spanned the river.

The Muslim scouts got to the river bank and saw the remnants of the bridge. They could see from their place of concealment the walls of Cordoba rising on the far bank. There was no way of getting across the river without getting wet. They would have to swim with their horses.

They also found a shepherd who had information to give about Cordoba and its defences. According to what this shepherd said, all the principal inhabitants had left the city and gone to Toledo. The governor was still in the city — a Gothic prince of royal blood — and he had under his command a force of 400 soldiers and some followers. The citizens who remained in the city were the poor and downtrodden, unlikely to be of much value as a fighting garrison.

The shepherd also said that the wall surrounding the city, the near edge of which ran along the river bank, was strong and high and well-defended. It allowed of no easy ingress. But there was a breach in the wall, by the Gate of the Statue. The shepherd described the wall and the breach.

1. This later became a farm called Cortijo de los Torres.

The problem that now faced the Muslims was the crossing of the river. The Berbers were not river folk. They would have to cross the river on horseback, but the space between the wall and the far bank was only about fifty feet wide[1] and did not allow room for 700 horses. They would have to reduce the number of horses by crossing two men to a horse.

Then there was the problem of surprise. The Gothic sentries on the wall would see the Muslims on the south bank as soon as they broke cover, and if the crossing were carried out at night they would see the Muslims as they got to the far bank. They would also hear the stamping of the horses' hooves. If the Muslims were to take advantage of the breach in the wall in order to get into the city, they would have to cross direct to the breach. The problem offered no easy solution.

Then Allah came to the aid of the faithful. The weather turned bad; the sky became overcast; a strong wind began to blow. Before long a storm was brewing, and as night fell a heavy rain began to come down which soon turned to hail. Mughees, spirited and aggressive as always, took this as the right opportunity to force a crossing of the river and storm the city.

The Muslims hurriedly moved up to the south bank, near the site of the demolished Roman bridge facing the Gate of the Statue. Mounting two men to a horse, on the orders of Mughees, they plunged into the river in pelting rain and hail. The crossing was safely accomplished. The entire force assembled on the far bank between the river's edge and the city wall. The rain and hail had driven the sentries from the battlements, with the result that no one saw the approach of the Muslims. Moreover, the foul weather drowned the sound of the horses' hooves as they stamped about under the wall of the city.

The shepherd now led the Muslims to the breach, or what he regarded as the breach. Whatever this breach was, it was not sufficient to let the Muslims through. They could not get in. In fact, they were now stranded on the far bank without cover, completely exposed to arrows and javelins

1. Thirty cubits (Maqqari: vol.1, p.261).

hurled from the battlements, should the enemy discover their location and plight. They were in a perilous position.

Mughees lost no time in finding a way out. There was a large fig tree growing by the gate, the upper branches of which gave access to the top of the wall. Mughees sent one of his warriors up the tree, and from the top branches the athletic young fellow was able to leap across to the wall. There was still no activity inside the city, thanks to the weather.

Mughees next unwound his turban and threw its wieghted end up to the man on the wall. With the aid of the turban others climbed up the face of the wall. When a certain number of men had gathered on top, Mughees told them to get down inside and do their work.

This small group of Muslim warriors quickly slipped down the inner side of the wall and attacked the sentries huddled near the gate. Some of these sentries were killed but others were able to escape and raise the alarm. In the meantime the Muslims had broken the lock and thrown the gate open, whereupon Mughees and his men rushed into the city with drawn swords.

There was no fighting near the gate, or even deeper inside the city. The governor, instead of reacting vigorously against the intruders, had decided to abandon the city to its fate. During the time it took the Muslims to get organised and start moving in, the Gothic prince had got his 400 warriors off the battlements, and taking advantage of his better knowledge of the streets, moved them quickly and without hindrance to the south-western corner of the city, to the gate of Seville. The Goths went into the church which had already been prepared for this eventuality.

This was the Church of San Acisclo. It was like a citadel which could easily be strengthened for defence and would defy any attacker. What made it even more defensible was the fact that its water supply was assured. It was fed by a spring in the foothills outside Cordoba, whose water was brought to the church through a subterranean channel. With its water supply assured, with provisions stocked for a long siege, the defenders could hold out in their church indefinitely.

The Muslims occupied the city. Mughees took up his residence in a palace and the soldiers billeted themselves in nearby houses. The people of Cordoba offered no resistance while the Jews, as expected, received the invaders with open arms and placed themselves at their disposal. Mughees had got the city of Cordoba, but he had not got the Church of San Acisclo where 400 determined Gothic warriors would hold out as long as their supplies lasted.

Mughees wrote to Tariq, who was on his way to Toledo. He explained the situation, how much he had achieved, how much was still to be done, how the Christian garrison of Cordoba remained unsubdued in the citadel. Mughees had no siege equipment; he would just have to starve the garrison into submission.

*

The siege wore on for more than two months. Begun at the end of Shawwal (third week of August) it continued until early Muharram (late October). It sorely tried the Goths cooped up inside the church with their families. It also tried the Berbers who were an outdoor, fresh-air type of people who preferred open, fast-moving warfare to the dull rigours of a siege.

Even two months was too long a period for a man of Mughees' restless nature. The delay irked him. He was impatient to get on and felt that something had to be done. Then suddenly he got the idea that if he captured one of the defenders he might get information out of him which would lead to the capture of the church.

Following the scheme he had in mind, he picked one of his slaves, a black named Rabah, who was a man of courage and strength and proven loyalty. This man would creep into the orchard next to the church, hide himself in the shrubbery, pounce upon any unwary Goth coming out of the church and bring him in. They would then interrogate the prisoner and try to discover ways of getting into the church. It was a good plan, well worth trying.

Rabah's assets lay more in his brawn than in his brain. With his powerful muscles and stout heart he was just the man to have on one's side in the thick of battle, but he

was by no means the ideal man for work which demanded intelligence and judgement. His slow-wittedness spoilt the whole plan, though indirectly things worked out to the advantage of the Muslims.

The black fellow waited patiently in the bushes for his Goth. Some hours passed. He got hungry. His hunger sharpened as time passed but there was still no Goth in sight. When he looked up at the trees which spread above him he saw their branches laden with fruit, for it was the season when many fruits ripen. The fruit was just what he needed to satisfy his hunger.

He climbed into a large tree whose fruit promised a good meal. He got among the top branches and there set about plucking fruit and stuffing himself, unmindful of any danger to his position. It was the noise and the shaking of branches, as the negro chomped away, that attracted the attention of the defenders. They spotted him in his tree. A party of soldiers rushed into the orchard, forced him down, overpowered him and took him inside as a captive.

Their first reaction on seeing Rabah was a mixture of fear and amazement. These blond Germanic people — at least the ones in Cordoba — had never seen a negro before. This was the first time that they were setting eyes on a man so utterly different to themselves. Some thought that perhaps he was painted or dyed with a dark hue which could be removed so that he would look like the rest of them. They rushed him down to the water channel which brought water to the church through the subterranean passage, and here they began to wash and scrub him with a hard brush in an endeavour to turn him into a white man.

It took Rabah some time to understand why they were doing this to him. The poor fellow bore it for a while. Then, as the operation became more painful and there was a danger of his losing his skin from the hard scrubbing, he begged them to stop. Using some sort of sign language he was able to convey his distress to his captors and explain that he was a human being just like them, though of a different colour.

They understood him at last and ceased their efforts to wash off his black colour. But now their fear and astonishment increased as they came to realise that he was not just painted but really and naturally black—to them an unheard—of colour for a human being. They put chains on him and kept him under guard; and people kept coming to stare at him and marvel at his colour.

Thus a week passed. Curiosity waned and the Goths began to pay less attention to their black prisoner. This gave him his chance. The strong fellow broke his chains, killed the few guards who were left to keep watch over him and made a dash for freedom. He was successful in effecting his escape and stood once more before his beloved master, to whom he related his adventure. He described in detail the conduit which brought water to the church, the direction from which it came, its level below ground.[1]

Mughees at once sent for the local engineers who dealt with matters of water supply and gave them the task of establishing the source and direction of the water flowing to the chruch. This they were able to do without delay. The source of water was discovered; the flow of water was stopped.

There was now no water flowing into the church of San Acisclo. There was no water supply except for what little may have been kept in cisterns. The garrison was doomed. The first man to know it and show that he knew it was the pusillanimous Gothic prince who had been commander of the garrison.

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It was now early Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year 93, which began on October 19, 711. Thanks to the adventure of Rabah which had led to the closure of their water supply, the defenders in the church were being brought to their knees. Mughees offered them peace on terms of Islam or the Jizya, but they spurned his offer. The siege would go on.

The first sign which appeared of a breakdown in cohesion and loss of confidence among the defenders was the flight of their prince. Forsaking his soldiers and his family, he slipped out of the church, mounted a swift horse and galloped away. It was his intention to get to the hills, the Sierra de Cordoba, whence he would make his way to Toledo to join his

1. This remarkable episode is taken from Maqqari: vol.1 p.262, and Ibn-ush-Shabat: p.144.

fellow Goths. His soldiers and his family were left to fend for themselves.

Mughees was informed by friendly locals about the flight of the Christian general. No sooner did he come to know of the event than he leapt on to his horse and gave chase. He gained on his quarry, and at last caught up with him near the village of Talavera (Talbeera) some distance west of Cordoba.[1]

The Gothic general looked back. One frightened glance at his pursuer was enough to make him desperate. He forced his horse into a faster pace and faced him towards a wide ditch which ran across his path. The horse took the ditch beautifully, jumping clear across it, but the prince fell off in mid-flight and landed in the ditch. In the fall he hurt his neck.

When Mughees arrived upon the scene he found a dejected Goth sitting on his shield at the bottom of the ditch. He had been shaken by the fall and sat nursing his injured neck. He had no fight left in him. Thus the unhappy man offered no resistance as Mughees disarmed him and brought him back to the city.

This Gothic general was the only prince of the royal blood taken captive by the Muslims in Spain. Others either submitted peacefully and thus avoided captivity, or fled to Toledo and then to Galicia. Mughees looked after him well, intending to take him to Damascus and present him to the Caliph, but the poor fellow was not destined to see Damascus or the Caliph. His end is described in a later chapter.

Mughees again offered terms to the garrison — Islam or the Jizya. Again the terms were rejected. The garrison fought on bravely and was eventually defeated and killed to the last man. Just how the Muslims took the church is not clear. One account has it that the Muslims set fire to the church and as the Goths came rushing out to escape the flames they were fought and killed. Western sources assert that the Goths surrendered and were killed while captives. This may be true, though for 400 Goths to surrender to 700 Berbers without fighting it out or making a bid for liberty seems less than honourable. However, because of this episode the church was known for many years afterwards as the

1. Also called Qutelbeera, Catluira and Collera; now the village of Ollerias. (Saavedra: p.84.)

Church of the Captives. There were no survivors among the 400 Gothic soldiers.

All Cordoba was now in Muslim hands. The siege had lasted two months and a half, having ended in the first half of Muharram 93 Hijri (end of October 711). Here also the Muslims placed the administration of the city in the hands of the Jews, with a small detachment of soldiers to assist them and to make sure that the conquered city remained conquered.

*

All that remains to be told is the story of the daughter of the Gothic prince as related by the historian Al Hijari. The women-folk of the Gothic soldiers and of those who had supported them in battle (not those of the populace) were taken as a prize of war. They belonged now to the conquerors, according to the usage of war. Included in this prize was the household of the prince which contained many beautiful women, among whom was his young daughter, a maid of ravishing beauty . . . "a full moon among the stars."

Mughees was stunned at sight of the girl. Completely infatuated, he felt an irresistible urge to possess her. Exercising his right as the commanding general, he let it be known that she was his and gave orders that she be prepared for him.

The girl, on the other hand, was adamant that she was not going to be possessed by anyone against her wishes, general or common soldier. All persuation failed. Mughees made repeated advances which were all rejected. Finally, driven by desire for his beautiful captive, he placed her in charge of an official, probably a kind of major domo, and instructed him to chastise her severely in case she remained unwilling to submit.

The man conveyed Mughees's ultimatum to the princess. She must submit or face dire consequences. He made it clear to the reluctant virgin that she would find the embraces of the Arab commander more pleasant than the punishment he would inflict upon her.

After some deliberation the girl feigned to acquiesce. She told her captor that she was willing. But she had no

intention of losing her chastity and was prepared to die in its defence. So she had a robe prepared for Mughees to wear as a bridegroom's robe which she had impregnated with some poisonous substance. It would kill its wearer. And if he died after taking his pleasure rather than before it, she would at least be avenged.

Fortunately for the Muslim general, he was informed by a servant in the princess's household of the girl's deadly design. He was dumbfounded. The courage of the Gothic princess and her determination to die rather than lose her chastity compelled his admiration while her helplessness moved his compassion. He let her be, chaste and unmolested.

Mughees knew that he was lucky. He praised Allah and said: "If the spirit of this maiden had lived in the breast of her father, Cordoba would not have fallen in a night."[1]

1. Maqqari: vol.3, p.13.

9. THE FALL OF TOLEDO

Having sent off the two columns for Cordoba and the south, Tariq began his march from Ecija. It was the beginning of Zu Qad 92 Hijri (third-fourth week of August 711). His objective was Toledo, 250 miles to the north, the capital of the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. The exact strength of the army which marched with him is not known, but allowing for the casualties suffered at Ecija and the detachment of forces under Mughees al-Rumi and Zaid bin Qesadi, it probably numbered around 10,000, all mounted.

Tariq marched eastwards, using minor roads for his movement and avoiding the main road to Cordoba. When he got to Jaen he swung north, crossed the Guadalquivir at Menzibar and then took the main road to Toledo. Some sources suggest that he made a detour from the right, via the present Villanueva de la Fuente,[1] but the point is not important. He arrived at Toledo without meeting opposition on the way.

It is interesting to study the principle of security in the advance involving a deep and narrow penetration as effected by Tariq. A cautious general would worry about the threat to his flanks and rear from enemy forces bypassed in the advance. Not securing the ground along the line of advance undoubtedly poses a risk as the advance goes deeper. However, the threat is not from ground left unswept but from an enemy who could use that ground. If there is no enemy force with the will or capability to use that ground, there is no threat. In this situation the only known hostile forces were in

1. Saavedra: p.79.

Cordoba and the south of Spain, and for these forces Tariq had earmarked suitable detachments. There was no one else who could pose a serious problem to the Muslims as they advanced into the heart of Spain. By himself creating a threat to the enemy's base, he made it impossible for the enemy to create a threat to his communications. Moreover, the fact that his army was a mobile, live-off-the-land army and did not depend on lines of communication facilitated Tariq's aim of securing a quick and decisive victory over the centre of the enemy's political and military power.

So Tariq marched to Toledo, which trembled at the approach of the Muslim conqueror. The time of his arrival has not been recorded by historians, but considering the distance and the absence of opposition on the way, his mounted force could not have spent more than two or three weeks on the journey. His arrival at the Visigothic capital would thus be in about the middle of Zu Qad or soon after (before the middle of September).

Toledo was once the "Toletum" of the Romans, a small fortified town captured by them in 193 BC. It was occupied by the Gothic King Theudis in the middle of the 6th Century and had been ever since the capital of the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. Located almost exactly in the centre of the peninsula, it was geographically the right place for the capital.

It was also a most defensible town. Sitting on a rugged promontory of granite, it was protected on three sides by the deep gorge of the fast-flowing River Tagus. The river approached the town at its north-eastern edge, flowed down its eastern side, turned round along the south and went up the western side of the town before flowing away in a westerly direction. Toledo was cradled by a curve of the Tagus, with a range of green, wooded hills rising on the southern side of the curve. The gorge had precipitous sides, 500 feet high, which though not impossible to climb made an attack very difficult, with the result that the capital could be attacked only from the north. The town and the citadel, which stood on a high rock overlooking the eastern arm of the gorge, should have given the defenders confidence, but did not. Toledo was in no position to dispute with the Muslim conqueror, for reasons more psychological than otherwise.

There was no high command to direct operations in the Spanish kingdom. What amounted to a high command had perished on the banks of the Barbate. All that remained of the command structure was individual generals, some braver than others, who commanded their own separate forces, neither aiding their fellow Goths nor being aided by them, continuing to resist and holding out in castles because it was their duty to do so. There was no one in charge, no political head, no supreme commander or staff. The senate was still there but would need time to select another man as king who would then create a team to run affairs of war and peace. In the matter of command and direction of war there was at the moment a vacuum, and this contributed to the failure of resolve on the part of the Christian population of Toledo to defend their city.

On the other hand Tariq's fame had preceded him. The hard blows given by him to the Gothic armies and his unbroken chain of victories had led to frightening reports about the invincibility of the Muslims. The terrified remnants of the Gothic forces which had broken under Muslim attacks grossly exaggerated, as vanquished soldiers are apt to do, the valour of the Muslims, the rapidity of their movements and the cunning of their plans. The flower of the Gothic army either lay dead on the battlefields of the Barbate and Ecija or wandered aimlessly as fugitives. Those who had taken refuge at Toledo now fled to the northern provinces. Even the Metropolitan of Toledo, an eminent clergyman named Sinderedo, saw wisdom in flight and did not stop till he had got to Rome, leaving his followers to fend for themselves. Only a handful of Gothic warriors remained in Toledo, along with a subject populace which had neither a taste for war nor the qualifications for waging it.

Tariq arrived to find the gates of Toledo closed against him. Since the only access to the town was from the north, he crossed the Tagus and went into camp on the northern side of the town. He moved detachments up close to the wall. The inhabitants, with few munitions of war and no hope of succour from outside, took only a few days to realise the futility of resistance. They asked for terms and were happily surprised to see how generously they were to be treated by the conquerors.

According to the terms imposed by Tariq, the inhabitants would give up their weapons and horses. Those who wished to depart were free to do so, though without their possessions, while those who elected to stay were assured the security of all they possessed. They were free to exercise their religious faith and use their churches as before; even to administer themselves under their own laws. Nothing would be taken from them. There would be no pillage, no captivity, no slavery. All they had to do in return was to remain peaceful and law-abiding and to pay the Jizya — a light poll tax from which old men, women and children were exempt.

The gates of Toledo were thrown open and the Muslims went in. There was no trouble. The army took up its quarters in the town. Tariq and his guard occupied the royal palace in the citadel overlooking the Tagus, later known as the Alcazar.

This was the greatest prize in Spain. The victory, though bloodless, was far-reaching in its consequences. Never again would the Visigoths rise in strength against the invaders. But Tariq was not content with what he had achieved. It was still September, there was plenty of good weather left for campaigning, and there were these persistent reports of Goths fleeing from the capital collecting in large fortified towns beyond the mountains. Tariq could not rest while there were more laurels to be won in the holy war.

He spent some time organising the administration of the conquered city, again with the Jews in charge of it. He left a small garrison of soldiers to keep control over the city. And he ordered the bulk of his army to prepare to march out for another campaign.

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There is much dispute about what Tariq did after Toledo, where he went, how far he went. There are those who say that he traversed the land of Rome (actually Galicia) where he encountered a people who were like savages and beasts;[1] those who say that he plunged into Galicia and Asturias, the northern provinces of Spain;[2] those who say that

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p.49.
2. Maqqari: vol.1, p.264 ; Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol.4, p.215.

he penetrated Leon and Castile and took Gijon on the Cantabrian coast;[1] while others maintain that these deeper objectives were taken later, after Musa had joined up with Tariq.[2] These last sources are right, for the year was too far advanced for deep objectives.

There are others who ascribe to Tariq a limited penetration beyond the Guadarrama Mountains, while yet others place the limit of his penetration short of the range. Here too the latter version is more probable, though he may have gone deeper than just the line of the Guadarramas. It is this last version of a limited penetration which is described in this chapter, while the possibility of error is acknowledged. The expedition was launched while the year 92 Hijri had not yet run its course and Tariq was back in Toledo in early 93 Hijri (which began on October 19, 711). He may have been gone for a month or two but not more, because by mid November the northern part of Spain suffers winter conditions which would not be conducive to operations, not by Arabs and Berbers.

The march was begun in early October (middle of Zul Haj). It was directed at Wadi-ul-Hajara (Valley of Stones), which is the name by which the Arabs called the ancient Roman town of Compluto and which has since been Spanishised into Guadalajara. They crossed the low hills which extend south of Alcala de Henares and went through a pass somewhere in these hills which came to be known as Fajj Tariq, i.e. Pass of Tariq.[3]

Somewhere in this area Tariq captured the town of Maya or Amaya, where Gothic soldiers had taken refuge but which was captured without much trouble. He also took the city of Maida (meaning table) which was probably the present Alameda, south of Alcala de Henares. Here he found the fabulous Table of Solomon of which a detailed description is given in a later chapter.[4] The region of Alcala de Henares and Guadalajara appear to be the limit of Tariq's advance to the

1. Gibbon: vol.5, pp. 562-3.
2. Maqqari: vol.1, p.215; Levy Provencal: p.15; Saavedra: p.80.
3. Some locate the pass farther north, identifying it with Buitrago, beyond the Guadarramas, about 40 miles from Madrid.
4. The table may have been taken at Toledo itself (Saavedra: p. 80). Some equate Maida with Alcala de Henares.

north. He stopped, not only because winter was about to set in but also because his soldiers begged him to stop.

The men were exhausted. They had been on the move for six months with almost no respite, driven by their indefatigable commander. They were tired of marching and fighting . . . "their bodies were dried up!" They said to Tariq, "Are you not content with all the victories which Allah has bestowed upon you?"

Tariq laughed as he replied, "By Allah, if you would stick by me I would go on until I stood at the gates of Rome and Constantinople and would conquer them with Allah's help. Then you really would be tired!"[1]

Tariq realised that he had pushed his men to the limits of human endurance. Moreover, the cold winter of northern Spain was setting in. So he returned to Toledo, getting back to the capital in the early weeks of 93 Hijri (October or November 711).

Tariq and his men settled down in Toledo to await further orders from their Commander-in-Chief.' Soon after their return they were joined by the column which Tariq had sent out from Ecija under Zaid bin Qesadi to subdue the south of Spain. Tariq's campaign was over.

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Tariq conquered Spain, virtually. Others after him would also claim that honour but it was Tariq who broke the back of the Gothic power in two fierce battles. All that remained after that was isolated and uncoordinated resistance which would be overcome, with some exceptions, in what was little more than mopping up operations. He had taken the capital and centre of political and military power of the Visigothic kingdom, while Mughees al-Rumi, working under his orders and according to his plan, had conquered Cordoba, the second most important seat of power in Spain. Toledo was the high watermark of Tariq's campaign.

Tariq had established his base on the south coast of Spain from which sprang the Muslim conquest and which prepared the ground for the first great battle against the

1. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 49.

Goths. In what, in terms of movement of those days, amounted to a lightning campaign, Tariq advanced from the banks of the Barbate to Toledo, covering a distance of 500 miles in three months, during which he not only fought and won two bloody battles, at the Barbate and Ecija, but also overcame sundry opposition. It was his leadership—his inexhaustible energy, his fierce zeal, his tactical skill and his dedication to the cause of the holy war, undeterred by the hostility of an ungrateful superior—which made this glowing success possible. It was Tariq who could rightly claim to be the conqueror of Spain, his place assured as one of the glorious figures of Muslim history who conquered another land to add to the brotherhood of Islam.

But Tariq's campaign was over. Henceforth operations in Spain would be directed and coordinated by Musa bin Nusair. Tariq had done his job. He settled down at Toledo for the winter and for a well-earned rest.

An enormous amount of booty was taken in this campaign, especially at Toledo, of which four-fifths were distributed among the Muslim warriors and one-fifth, according to Quranic law, put aside for Damascus as the share of the state. Historians have given mind-boggling accounts of the spoils of war, which are probably somewhat exaggerated. We are told that in Toledo the Muslims collected a vast amount of wealth in gold and silver, in goods beyond counting, in treasure which left them spellbound. There were 25 crowns of gold adorned with pearls and precious stones, one belonging to each of the Gothic kings who had reigned in Spain. There were a thousand swords studded with rubies and pearls. There were several vessels filled with rubies, emeralds, topazes and pearls. There were utensils of gold and silver which defy description. There was a huge carpet depicting a garden scene with branches of gold and chains of pearls and rubies and topaz. And there was the Table of Solomon.[1]

Tariq's greatest achievement, however, was not the spoils but the conquest itself; and this would not have been possible without his 12,000 dauntless warriors. His army was mainly a Berber army with a handful of Arabs and Negroes.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, pp. 288-9; Gayangos: vol.1, pp.282-3; Conde: p.65.

They fought not as men of a certain race or tribe but as Muslims, without distinction of race or colour. The Berbers who comprised the detachment of Mughees thought of him not as an Arab, distinct from themselves, but as a Muslim, just like themselves.

Since it was the Berbers who conquered Spain and laid the foundations upon which the history of 800 years of Muslim Spain was built, it would be of interest to the reader to know something about them. Who were the Berbers?[1]

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A good deal of research has been carried out on the Berbers by scholars and historians. Ibn Khaldun wrote many chapters on their origin, their tribal structure, their political and social organisation, their history, religion, etc. Later scholars of the West have spent years labouring on this research. The picture of the Berber background and origin, however, is still not very clear and there is still much that is vague and possibly incorrect in our knowledge of this people.

The Berbers are not one race or one group of people. They comprise several groups which entered the mainstream of North African life, coming from many directions and interacting one upon another. They evolved into a group with more or less similar racial and cultural characteristics. The group eventually became the largest one inhabiting the northern zone of Africa from Western Egypt to the Atlantic, populating what are now the countries of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania.

Originally, it appears, the largest group which came to comprise the Berber nation consisted of Oceanic peoples. They came from Crete, Cyprus or Asia Minor, perhaps even from parts of ancient Greece. They came to Palestine as a maritime nation and invaded Canaan in about the 12th Century BC. They were the Philistines of the Bible.

Eventually the conflict between them and the Semites culminated in a battle between King David and Goliath, the gigantic leader of the Philistines. Goliath was slain in single combat by David, and as a result of their defeat the

1. The description that follows is taken from this writer's "The Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa:" pp.217-9.

Philistines were forced to move out of the land. They came to Egypt, but their presence was not welcome to the Copts who drove them out of the country. They went to Barqa, and here they split into tribes and clans, some settling down in Libya and others moving farther into the Maghreb until they reached the shores of the Atlantic.

Before they got to North Africa, however, there were European peoples already living in the region who fused with and became one with the newcomers. These peoples, taken as a whole, were the ancestors of the Berbers as we know them.

In later centuries the Berbers fought the Romans, won some battles tactically but lost most wars strategically. At last they submitted to Roman rule. It came to be understood that the coastal cities and the valleys would belong to the Romans, the mountains and deserts to the Berbers.

The Berbers are of Eurasian stock. They have Caucasoid features with brown pigmentation, often fair and even blond, especially in the mountains of the Maghreb. At one time they spoke a Hamitic language which has come down to the present-day Berber language in its various dialects spoken from the Suwa Oasis in Western Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean and from the River Niger to the Mediterranean Sea. Some Berber tribes are perhaps not Berber at all, e.g. the Kutama, the Sinhaja.[1]

They followed whoever came in strength and conquered their land. They joined the conquerors in plundering others. In time they even plundered their earlier masters by joining new conquerors who came with sufficient power to take over the land. Their fortunes shifted with the shift in fortune of their conquerors and the foreign rulers of North Africa.

In religion they varied. Many tribes were Jewish as a result of influences coming down from the days of Goliath. Many tribes adopted Christianity because of their contact with the Romans. Many were sun-worshippers. Some worshipped idols while yet others were pagans. They were inconsistent and wore their religion lightly, like clothes to be discarded when no longer needed. With the first coming of

1. According to Ibn Khaldun (vol.2, p.95; vol.6, p.177) these tribes are of ancient Arabian extraction.

Islam to North Africa they accepted the new faith also, then reverted to whatever they had followed before. They would again become Muslims and again apostatise. They apostatised twelve times in the early Islamic period and it was not till the time of Musa bin Nusair that Islam gained a permanent hold on the Berbers' heart.

The Muslims, fighting in North Africa, found in the Berbers the fiercest enemies they had encountered in their history. The courage and toughness of the Berbers, their resilience in recovering from one bloody defeat to come back for more, their tenacity in opposing the Muslim advance, faced the Muslims with greater military difficulties than they had experienced in their wars against the Romans and the Persians. The Berbers proved themselves a valiant nation, but in the end they submitted to Islam. Once they had become Muslims, and remained Muslim, they rose again as the greatest holy warriors of the time.

Their name came from their contact with the Arabs. In Arabic the word *barbar* means to mutter, to make a noise which no one understands. There were many dialects in the Berber language and they kept talking and disputing with each other. The Arabs thought that no one did so much *barbar* as these people. The name stuck: Barbar or, as now spelt in English, Berber.[1]

They were a brave people, warlike and chivalrous with intense tribal feeling. They were loyal to their chiefs whom they followed unquestioningly in war and peace. They were a fine-looking people with strong, handsome men and strong, beautiful women. They were men of the desert and the mountain, combining the characteristics of both. They were unfailing in their friendship, unforgiving in their enmity.

These then were the Berbers, the holy warriors of Islam. They not only conquered Spain for Islam and for the Arab power in Damascus, but would in later centuries even provide two dynasties to rule over the peninsula.

1. Ibn Khaldun: vol.6, p. 175.

10. THE CHRISTIANS AND THE JEWS

The first appearance of Christianity in Spain is a matter of legend rather than history. There are those who believe that it came to the peninsula in the first century, during the apostolic period, that it was brought by Saint Paul who visited Spain between 63 and 67. From the traditional lore of some cities in Spain it would appear that Paul first came to Gerona and during his travels went as far as Ecija. This could be true, but there is no historical corroboration of the tradition and many historians doubt the veracity of these reports.

There is also the curious legend of James, the Apostle, son of a fisherman of Galilee, visiting Spain as the first preacher of Christianity to the Spaniards. Historically it is known that Saint James, who was present at the Crucifixion and never travelled abroad, was martyred in 44, beheaded by order of King Herod Agrippa. His headless body was buried in Jerusalem. But those who believe easily maintain that he came to Spain before his martyrdom, converted nine Iberians and then returned to Jerusalem where he was beheaded and buried.

Then there is the even more curious legend that the body of James was disinterred and the head found miraculously to be back with the body, where it belonged. The body was shipped to the west coast of Spain and buried in Galicia. All this happened apparently in the year 44, whereafter the body remained preserved against the ravages of time. But this legend did not begin to circulate till the early

part of the 9th Century and will be taken up in a later volume.

It is known that there were Christians in Spain in the 2nd Century, and that in the 3rd Century they were persecuted by the Romans. Over a period many of them were killed by the Romans in Seville, Cordoba, Barcelona and Gerona. During the 3rd Century Christian communities multiplied in the country. In about 247 Gerona became the see of a bishop, and in 300 was held what was probably the first council of bishops in Spain.

The Christianity practised in Spain was the Roman Catholic version. It gained an impetus in the early part of the 4th Century when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire, giving his own name to Constantinople where he moved the seat of the empire. The faith now spread more rapidly but for a long time the Christians remained a minority in Spain.

Then came the Visigoths, in the 6th Century. They were Christians, and it could be expected that their coming would give greater strength to Christianity in Spain. But the Visigoths were Arians, and instead of the Christians uniting as a single force for the propagation of the faith, they got embroiled in a great sectarian schism known as the Monophysite Controversy. The full fury of the controversy, however, was felt not in Spain, not even in Italy, but in Greece, Syria and Egypt.

The main point of the dispute was not any matter of substance or any important moral or practical issue affecting the lives of the Christians but a purely academic one regarding the person and nature of Jesus. Was Jesus a man? Was he God? Was he both? This also affected the position of his mother, the Virgin Mary. Was she mother of God or of a man? And in this futile controversy curses were hurled by Christians at each other, anathemas read, people tortured and slaughtered and whole communities driven to revolt.

It started with Arius, Presbyter of Alexandria (318-81), who argued that Jesus the Son was created, and therefore not eternal, and therefore not the equal of God the Father. This doctrine was closer to the Muslim belief, when Islam appeared, that Jesus was a man, a prophet and a

servant of God. But the Arian view was challenged by the orthodox clergy who took the opposite view.

The Emperor Constantine called a council of bishops at Nicaea in 325. At this council the orthodox view prevailed, advocated by Athanasius, that the Son was equal to the Father. At the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381 this Nicene creed was confirmed, but the official doctrine was by no means accepted by everybody and the dispute continued.

The storm of the controversy lashed the Christian world for a hundred years until the appearance of Nestorius, when the storm became more violent. Nestorius was a man of Persian descent born in Syria who became bishop of Constantinople and was merciless in suppressing disagreement—heresy, he called it—but ended up by himself getting caught in the net of the controversy.

Somewhere along the line another heresy entered the dispute, known as the Jacobite heresy. Further details, however, would not interest the reader. The dispute had nothing to do with the actual teachings of the gentle prophet (on whom be peace) but the conflict battered the Christian world for three hundred years with violence and bloodshed and threats of eternal damnation.

The Visigoths were Arians, i.e. followers of Arius, and clung to their simpler and more natural belief. Conflict with the Roman Catholic church was inevitable, and it arose soon after the Visigoths had settled down to ruling the country. The contestants were spared the violence and suffering which plagued the Eastern Roman Empire, but the conflict continued to simmer between the simple, barbaric Goths and the more sophisticated Roman clergy.

At last, in 587, King Reccared accepted the Catholic faith and let himself be baptised. Thereafter all his Gothic subjects followed suit. Two years after the conversion of the king the Arian faith was officially rejected at the Third Council of Toledo.

According to one view, the Goths cared so little about religious dogmas that they changed from Arianism to Catholicism as soon as the king had set the example.[1]

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1. Dozy : p.237.

According to another, there was sharp resistance to the change; Reccared had to suppress the Arian church organisation and ban Arians from employment in the public service before his followers accepted the new official religion.[1] Both reports are probably correct, the resistance coming from the clergy, the indifference from the people. After Reccared's death there was a backlash from the Arian clergy but it lasted only a few years, whereafter nothing more was heard of Arianism in Spain.

Christianity sat lightly on the people of Spain, whether Romans or Romanised Spaniards or Visigoths. Right up till the coming of the Muslims paganism was rampant with a vast number of Spaniards remaining faithful to their ancient cults. The pagans were so numerous that paganism could dispute the land with Christianity. It posed such a serious challenge that bishops had to fulminate threats and take energetic measures against the worshippers of false gods. Even among professing Christians religion was more a matter of the lips than of the heart.[2]

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Judaism preceded Christianity to Spain. Certain Jewish sources maintain that the Jews came to the Peninsula in the 10th Century BC, in the time of Solomon, but there is no historical evidence to support this claim. They may have come then, or in any of the succeeding centuries. They certainly came in the 1st Century AD with their expulsion from Jerusalem which followed the destruction of their temple by the Romans in the year 70. They settled in Spain and called the land Sepharad, from which the large denomination of Sephardic Jews takes its name.

They lived peacefully in Spain, prospered and grew rich. They were very few in number and did not come in conflict with the followers of other faiths. But once Christianity had established a firm foothold in the peninsula at the beginning of the 4th Century their troubles began. It was not yet persecution; just hostility and discrimination.

1. Thompson : p.104.
2. Dozy : p.237.

Spain was still part of the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes were yet to come.

This hostility sprang not only from religious differences or the fact that the Christians looked upon the Jews as the murderers of Christ. It was also due to the resentment felt by the less enterprising communities against the affluence of the Jews. As everywhere else and throughout their history, the Jews had become extremely wealthy and used their wealth for the benefit of their own community rather than for the benefit of the land in which they lived and from which they drew their wealth.

The first shot against the Jews was fired in 306, when a church council of bishops forbade Christians to marry or work with Jews. Some followed the injunction, others did not. For two hundred years the hostility mounted gradually, until 506, when the Council of Agde forbade Christians to even eat with Jews. Again some followed the injunction while others did not. Another hundred years passed.

It was at the start of the 7th Century that the real persecution of the Jews began — a persecution which was to increase in intensity to brutal proportions. King Sisebut, ascending the throne of Spain in 612, passed a law which made it unlawful for the Jews to own Christian slaves. The Jews had to sell their Christian slaves and the property of those slaves to Christians at a fair price. If unable to do so they had to free the slaves. They were given three months to do this. If at the expiry of this period any Jew were found in possession of a Christian slave, half his property would be confiscated and the slave freed. The law also laid down that if a Jew converted a Christian to the Jewish faith, he would be put to death and all his property confiscated.[1]

This law was implemented and the sufferings of the Jews increased. But worse was to come, and after that yet worse. Following the enactment of this law another decree banned the Jews from holding public office and repeated the ban on inter-marriage between Christians and Jews.[2]

In 616, four years after his first law against the Jews, King Sisebut passed another severe decree which required all Jews to be converted before the end of the year. After that any

1. Thompson : p.165.
2. *Ibid* : p. 178.

Jew who clung to his faith would be given a hundred lashes and banished from the kingdom while all his property would be confiscated by the state. This time the bishops made more earnest efforts to stamp out Judaism and terrified by the brutality of the threatened measures, 90,000 Jews accepted baptism. This number was still a minority.[1]

The conversions were more a matter of form than spirit. The new converts paid lip service to the Christian faith while they secretly continued to circumcise their children and observe the Sabbath and other Mosaic rites. Even intermarriage continued between Christians and unconverted Jews, as did other actions forbidden to the Jews.

This came to be known. So the Fourth Council of Toledo repeated the ban on intermarriage and ordered public whipping as punishment for its breach. The bishops decided that Jews married to Christian women would be separated from their wives and children, and Christians married to Jewish women would be separated from their wives. In either case the children would be brought up as Christians.[2] The bishops realised that it was not possible to effect a total conversion of the Jewish population. It was therefore ordained that whereas Jews could practise their faith, their children would be taken away from them and brought up as Christians.[3]

In 638, during the reign of King Chintila, all baptised Jews were made to sign an enforced profession of faith in which they renounced their former faith and agreed to abandon Jewish rites: the Sabbath, circumcision and dietary rules. They promised to surrender their scriptures to the church and took upon themselves the duty of stoning to death any Jew who deviated from the Catholic faith.[4] What made the Jewish situation even more tragic was that converted Jews were not accepted as true Christians; their conversion was deemed worthless.[5]

Then came harsher measures, though still not the harshest. In about 650 King Reccesuinth's laws were made

1. Dozy : p.227.
2. Thompson: p. 179.
3. Descola: p.87
4. Thompson: p. 186.
5. Descola: p.87.

into a code. According to this code: no baptised Jew could leave the Christian faith or take flight to escape it; no Jew could celebrate Passover or the Sabbath; no Jew could be married by other than Christian rites; the practice of circumcision was banned; Jews would pay no regard to Jewish dietary rules; no Jew might testify against a Christian; no Jew, baptised or otherwise, could give evidence in court. The penalty for infringement of any of these laws was death by burning or stoning by people of his own race. In fact, to be a practising Jew was now a capital offence.[1]

In order to test how much the converted Jews believed in the new faith, in 654 all Jews of Toledo were made to sign a second enforced profession of faith, similar to the first one signed in 638.[2] In the following year, 655, at the Ninth Council of Toledo, the bishops ordered that all baptised Jews would spend Christian feasts in the company of local bishops who would approve their faith. Anyone failing to attend would be whipped.[3]

Ten years after the death of Reccesuinth, King Erwig (Euric) forbade Jews to possess or read books criticising the Christian faith, under penalty of a hundred lashes. He made this punishment applicable even to children above the age of 10. But, easing the burden of the laws of Reccesuinth, he decreed that not all the offences listed in the earlier code need be punished with death.

However, to show that he was not being merciful to a people whom he regarded as the worst of humanity, he ordered that all Jews would have to become baptised Catholics. Anyone not accepting baptism would receive the punishment of a hundred lashes, banishment and confiscation of property. As a horrible deterrant to the Jewish practice of circumcision, he laid down that both the person circumcised and the person performing the operation would have their genitals wholly amputated. If a woman were found guilty of arranging circumcision she would have her nose cut off.[4]

After Erwig came King Egica (687-701) who, like his predecessors, continued the persecution of the Jews, while

1. Thompson: p.206.
2. *Ibid*: p.186.
3. *Ibid*: p.208
4. *Ibid*: p.236.

adding to it a more subtle twist. He attacked their capacity to earn their living. In 687, or soon after, he decreed that Jews would not be allowed to go to the harbours for transacting overseas trade and would not be permitted to trade with Christians. He further declared that of Jewish property in the form of land, buildings, vineyards and olive groves, whatever had been acquired from Christian owners would be taken over by the state. Compensation would be paid as determined by the state.[1]

In spite of all that the Christians did to them the Jews lived on. They could trade among themselves and with the pagans, who still constituted a considerable part of the population of the peninsula. In spite of the terrible laws enacted against them they were able to practise their religion. They even held land of their own and even possessed Christian slaves, because the statutes were not always applied with full rigour. The Christian clergy would often turn a blind eye to their offences, sometimes out of pity, sometimes in return for bribes. Under the savage and persistent attacks of the Christian political and church organisation the Jews could exist, but they were about to face the last and most devastating blow from the Christian state, a blow which would imperil their very survival. This came in 694.

The king of Spain was still Egica, who had earlier tried to cut away the roots of the economic survival of the Jews. He now called a council of bishops, the Seventeenth Council of Toledo, at which he gave out the alarming news that in parts of the world the Jews had rebelled against their Christian rulers. He had "confessions" which clearly proved that the Jews of Spain were conspiring with the Jews of Africa to rise against their Christian masters and destroy the Christian religion. This was entirely an invention of Egica but it was readily accepted, indeed welcomed by the bishops.

They now took the harshest measures that it was possible to take against a religious minority. They decreed that the Jews would be stripped of all their property. They and their wives would be taken from their homes and enslaved forever, never to be freed. They would even be given

1. *Ibid:* p.246.

to their own former slaves. They would be allowed no opportunity to practise their religion. The most painful blow of all was that their children would be taken from them on reaching the age of 7 and given to devout Christian families, to be brought up in the Christian faith.[1]

Though in some areas bishops and judges found ways to avoid implementing this appalling law, in most of the country it was enforced with the utmost severity. The entire Jewish community was reduced to slavery, stripped of all it possessed, humiliated, imprisoned, its means of subsistence destroyed, its children over 7 years of age forcibly taken away, never to see their parents again. The Jews were left full of sorrow, full of hatred.[2]

What was once a prosperous community now lived in despair, an outcast nation facing total extinction. Yet, many of the oppressed families clung to their faith. In the secrecy of their homes, under the fearful shadow of discovery and savage reprisal, they practised their Jewish rites. They prayed for succour, though they saw little hope of receiving any. This would be the last generation of Jews in Spain. It was a doomed generation.

Then came Tariq bin Ziyad as the standard-bearer of Islam, offering freedom and dignity and equality before the law. With the coming of the Muslims the Jews of Spain were saved from extinction. In response, the Jews welcomed the Muslims with open arms, regarding them as liberators and saviours after four centuries of repression. The Muslims found that they could trust the Jews and appointed them to run the administration of the conquered cities, assisted by Muslim garrisons to maintain the conquest. The Jews repaid their deliverers with a loyalty which clashed with Gothic interests but was entirely natural and entirely justified. Under the benign rule of the Muslim conquerors the Jewish religion in Spain was to flourish for another eight centuries.

There were charges of treachery levelled against the Jews by the Christians who bit the dust at the hands of Tariq, to the effect that in many places like Cordoba and Toledo it was the Jews who opened the gates to the Muslims. It may have nursed the pride of the defeated Goths to make a

1. Dozy: pp.227-8; Thompson, pp.247-8.
2. Clissold : p.36; Descola : p.87.

scapegoat of the Jews, but the charges were false and patently unfair. Every city, every castle was fought into submission and taken in fair combat.

Nevertheless, the prejudice against the Jews persisted and over the centuries even hardened. Perhaps this was the consequence of a complex created in Christian minds by Muslim superiority in administration, science and culture. This prejudice remained so strong that some later historians, even in our time, attempted to throw upon the Jews the blame for the loss of Spain, asking us to believe that it was the Jews of Spain, working through their co-religionists in North Africa, who enticed the Muslims to the subcontinent. There is no truth in this allegation either. The Jews of North Africa, few in number as they were, commanded neither authority nor influence in that corner of the continent. The events which led to the launching of the Muslim invasion have already been described in earlier chapters of this book, and they had nothing to do with Jews.

It is interesting to recall that when at the end of nearly eight hundred years of Muslim rule the Jews of Spain again faced extinction at the hands of the Christians, immediately following the fall of Granada, and were expelled from the land, most of them sought sanctuary with the Muslims. They went to Turkey where the Sultans guaranteed religious freedom to all communities of the Ottoman Empire. It was with the followers of Muhammad (on whom be peace) rather than with the followers of Jesus (on whom also be peace) that the Jews found freedom, tolerance and dignity. Their descendants still live and thrive in Istanbul, still speaking their old Spanish language.

11. THE COMING OF MUSA

Musa bin Nusair took the decision to cross to Spain himself, with a larger and more mobile army than Tariq's, and take over direction of the war. Most historians tell us that his decision was motivated by envy of Tariq's success in the peninsula in terms of glory and spoils; that he did not wish Tariq to be the only one to reap the harvest of the conquest and even grudged him his victories; that he wished to claim the glory for himself.

This is true, but it is an over-simplified statement which casts an unfair aspersion on Musa. Civilian historians are not always aware of the intense rivalries which affect commanding generals in war : the desire for fame, the thirst for glory, the hunger for recognition as great victors. This leads to fierce competition and manifests in efforts not only to outdo their rivals but even at times to do them down. In our own time we have seen evidence of this envy in the Second World War, in all armies, of the east and the west, when leading generals strained every nerve to undercut one another. In itself this rivalry is not only understandable but also healthy. The desire for fame and glory is a nobler motivation than the lust for money or the craving for power over men which distinguish successful men of many other professions. This rivalry applied also to Musa and Tariq.

But envy of Tariq was not the only reason which led Musa to cross to Spain and conduct operations in person. Such partial statements are a disservice to historical truth and, in this instance, detract from the stature of Musa, whose

place in history as a holy warrior, as a conqueror and statesman, was already assured. Musa had spent his life in the service of Islam, extended the borders of Islam and won victories in the name of Allah which few others could claim. After a lifetime spent in the saddle he had reached the stature of a giant which no general of the time could dispute or challenge. Musa bin Nusair was a master of war. In matters of war he had nothing to learn from Tariq, and if his emotions aroused envy of his younger subordinate's victories, it only showed that he was human. Musa was coming to Spain not only for war and glory, which all generals seek, but also to serve Islam and gain merit with Allah.

It took time to prepare the army which would cross with Musa. Regiments had to be organised, horses and weapons provided to those who would use them. A large number of boats had to be constructed to ferry the army across the strait. Arrangements had to be made for the administration of North Africa in the absence of Musa, who appointed his son Abdullah to act as governor in his place at Qairowan.

The army numbered 18,000, a mainly cavalry force and a mainly Arab force with a few Berber troops, in contrast with Tariq's mainly Berber force which had a few Arab troops.[1] Musa took with him a number of venerated Muslims known as *Tabi (Arabic Tabi'een).* In the time of the Holy Prophet any Muslim who knew him personally was called a *Sahib* or *Sahabi,* meaning companion. After the Prophet any Muslim who knew a Sahabi was called *Tabi,* i.e. one who follows. Musa himself was a *Tabi* and at this time had in his company twenty five *Tabis* or *Tabi'een.* He took three of his distinguished sons with him, viz. Abdul Azeez, Abdul A'la and Marwan, as also Count Julian, the durable old campaigner who had given the Muslims the opening to Spain of which they had taken full advantage. Musa was ready to start in June 712 (Ramazan 93 Hijri).

The army was launched from Ceuta. Musa avoided Gibraltar, perhaps for psychological reasons, and landed at another spot not far from Algeciras. This place came to be

1. Some historians have given Musa's strength as 10,000, but the larger force appears to be more correct, as is evident from the operations which developed after Musa's landing in Spain.

known as *Marsa Musa,* i.e. Harbour of Musa,[1] while the hilly region around it came to be known as *Jabal Musa,* i.e. Hill of Musa or Mount Musa.[2] From here he moved the army to Algeciras and formed a base for the initial part of his campaign.

When the army had concentrated at Algeciras, Musa called a council of war at which, apart from his Muslim officers, Julian and his lieutenants were also present. At this conference he would plan and give orders for the next operation. Everyone expected that he would follow Tariq's route but Musa made it clear that he had no such intention.

"I shall not take the route which Tariq has taken", he said, "nor follow in his wake."

Julian, who was playing the part of chief adviser and guide, responded, "We shall lead you on a way which is better than his and guide you to cities more important and more wealthy than those taken by him, which have not been conquered before but which you shall conquer, if God wills it."[3]

Julian was exaggerating a bit, but the offer was pleasing to Musa and he set about making his plans accordingly. Musa's decision not to follow in Tariq's footsteps was not just an emotional rejection of his subordinate's example. It was also strategical wisdom. To advance with a large army through a zone already cleared by a predecessor would be a waste of effort and would not make military sense. There was a lot more of Spain to conquer, with hostile forces yet to be subdued. Musa was determined to take all of Spain. He would start with the south western quarter of the peninsula.

*

Musa began the operation by sweeping through the coastal zone west of Algeciras in order to establish a broad base for launching his forces into the interior. This was in July 712 (Shawwal 93 Hijri). There was no battle, and so far as is known, no blood was shed. The towns and villages

1. Ibn-ul-Qutya: p.9.
2. Maqqari : vol. 1, p. 269.
3. Maqqari: vol 1, p. 269; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.13.

through which he passed submitted without opposition. When Musa had got to Vejer he turned north.

The first place where he met serious opposition was Medina Sidonia. This was an ancient town perched atop a large hill which rose 1000 feet above sea level and dominated the fertile countryside around it. Musa laid siege to the town and soon after attacked and conquered it. This was his first battle and his first victory in Spain. From here he advanced towards Seville.

Before tackling Seville Musa would dispose of two fortresses which acted as outposts of the city. One was Alcala de Guadaira — 10 miles to the south-east, the other Carmona — 20 miles to the east of the city on the main road to Cordoba. Without taking these two places he would be in a vulnerable position because while engaged with Seville his rear would be open to attack from the direction of the two fortresses. Their clearance was necessary.

Alcala de Guadaira was the smaller of the two and posed no problem. Musa stormed the place and took it without difficulty. Leaving a garrison in occupation, he marched to Carmona.

Carmona was built for defence, by nature's design and by the skill of the military engineer, an almost impregnable fortress. It was said that there was no stronger position in Spain and none more difficult for a besieging force to capture.[1] It stood upon a ridge which rose above the plain, its slopes getting steeper near the top and at places capped by an escarpment.[2]

Musa invested Carmona without getting too near the walls. It was a loose kind of siege. Musa could find no way of attacking and getting inside the town, and he possessed no siege equipment.

Thus some days passed. Unable to find an answer to the problem of capturing the fortress, Musa turned for advice to his Christian allies who knew the country well. They told him that Carmona could not be taken except by finesse and

1. Maqqari : vol. 1, p.269.
2. In the ruins of the old castle of Carmona the Spanish Government has now built a beautiful *parador nacional* (state inn) which commands a magnificent view of the plain to the east.

guile, Musa, the master of stratagem, then devised a plan to get the fortress without having to scale its walls.

Late one afternoon a band of Christian cavalrymen came galloping to one of the gates of Carmona, saying that they were the survivors of a clash with the Muslims and had got away while their comrades had fallen in battle. They were dressed and armed in the normal Gothic fashion and spoke the local language. No one in Carmona knew that the horses they rode had been provided by Musa. They were let in as fugitives and given shelter. In fact, they were welcomed as an addition to the defenders' strength.

That night a large body of Muslim cavalry rode unseen and unheard to the main gate of the fort, known as the Gate of Cordoba. At the appointed time the fugitives — all followers of Julian — opened the gate. The Muslim horsemen rode through the gate to the centre of the town where they made short work of those who resisted their advance. By morning all was over. Only those Goths remained alive who surrendered and were now captive in Muslim hands.

With the fall of Carmona the entire region east of Seville was clear of Gothic troops. Musa advanced and made contact with Seville, which shared with Cordoba the distinction of being the greatest prize in Southern Spain.

*

Seville was symbolic of ancient Spain. It had existed since the earliest Iberian times and had been occupied successively by Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians. According to Muslim legend it was a man named Ishban who conquered Spain and built this city, which he named Ishbeeliya, and the country too was so named.[1] From Ishbeeliya (which is the Arabic name for Seville) and its legendary founder, Ishban, is derived the Arabic name for the peninsula: Isbania.

To the western world it was known as Hispalis, conquered by the Romans in 205 BC during their first thrust into Spain in the Second Punic War. They made it the capital of the province of Baetica, which meant the entire southern

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 134; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.2.

region of Spain except for the south-western corner of the peninsula.[1] The city was thoroughly Romanised and called "Little Rome," and was later to give Rome the emperors Trajan and Hadrian.

With the coming of the Germanic nations at the beginning of the 5th Century it was occupied by the Vandals and became the capital of their kingdom, the kingdom being southern Spain which they called "Vandalicia". But the Vandals passed on to North Africa and the Visigothic power which took over Spain established its capital at Toledo. Seville was no longer a seat of political and military power, but it remained a large and wealthy city and an important religious centre of Christian Spain.

Situated on the left bank of the Guadalquivir, it was a fortified city with strong battlements to challenge an attacker. It could be attacked only from the east and along its short flanks to north and south. Its rear, i.e. the west, was protected by the great river.

This was the city which Musa approached in about August 712 (Zu Qad 93 Hijri) He laid siege to Seville. Historians tell us that the siege went on for several months, but it could not have lasted more than two or three months, in view of the events which followed and which are described in subsequent chapters.

Then Musa conquered Seville. Nothing is known about how he did it, what course the battle took, how much blood was shed. But he took Seville, and the Christian warriors effected their escape. They crossed the river and retreated westwards, the bulk of them going to Beja and Ocsonoba. The rest of the population of the city came peacefully under Muslim rule.

Musa lost no time in organising the administration of Seville as a conquest of Islam. He placed the local Jews in charge of the administration and left a detachment of about a hundred soldiers to enforce law and order. Then, with the rest of the army, he marched to the place where he was to face his greatest military challenge in Spain — the ancient and powerful city of Merida.

1. In 152 BC the provincial capital was shifted to Cordoba.

12. THE CONQUEST OF MERIDA

The Goths had taken a terrible beating at the hands of the Muslims. First there had been the fierce battles against Tariq which had had a shattering effect on the Gothic army. They had been followed by the fall of Cordoba and Toledo, the latter being the nerve centre of Gothic political power which could have been expected to revive and reorganise Christian resistance in the peninsula. Then came Musa bin Nusair who conquered Seville and struck another serious blow at Christian hopes. With the passage of every month the sky turned darker for the Christians.

But the Gothic power, though weakened, had not been entirely destroyed. There were plenty of soldiers left with generals to lead them who had courage and spirit and who still believed in the possibility of expelling the invaders. They concentrated in various fortified cities to continue a stubborn resistance. There was no overall strategy because there was no overall commander. Nevertheless, every separate force was prepared to fight it out for as long as possible. One such force was in the fortified city of Merida.

Merida had a large number of soldiers, led by brave and dedicated officers, sufficient in strength not only to hold out but also to come out and fight in the open. The overall command of Merida was in the hands of the Governor of the province of Lusitama, Duke Sacarus, a Gothic general both brave and wise a fitting leader for such tenacious defenders as he possessed in his capital city.

Present in Merida also, to further inspire the troops, was the Gothic queen, widow of Roderic, a young and

beautiful lady by the name of Agela or Agilona, whom the Arabs called Ayela. She was not a great leader, as many women in history have been, and does not appear to have possessed any outstanding qualities except for beauty and a stubborn nature, but she acted as a symbol of Gothic resistance and her presence had the effect of strengthening the resolve of the soldiers.

Merida was another of the old cities of Spain. It was founded by the Romans in 25 BC on the right bank of the River Guadiana as a retirement home for veterans of the Fifth and Tenth Legions of the Roman Army which had distinguished themselves in the war in Spain. The city was named Augusta Emerita. Only two years before its founding the Romans had reorganised Spain in three provinces, and Merida became the capital of the southwestern province of Lusitania. This province comprised what is now Portugal south of the River Duero and the region of west-central Spain consisting of the present Estremadura, Avila and Salamanca. (North of Lusitania lay Galicia.)

Over the years Merida grew into a splendid city, famous for the fine granite bridge which stretched over Roman arches for half a mile to span the Guadiana. It was one of the great cities of Roman Spain. It had a theatre, an amphitheatre and a circus which included a race-course.[1] A high aqueduct, the ruins of which still stand to remind the visitor of Roman engineering skill, brought water from Lake Proserpina, a large reservoir five miles north of the city. It was still the capital of Lusitania when the Muslims landed in the country, though Lusitania was now one of six Visigothic provinces in Spain.[2]

Merida had the shape of a triangle with each side about a thousand yards long, more or less as it is today. Its south-western side faced the river. To the north and east of the city the ground was undulating with low, gentle hills separating low, gentle valleys. This rise and fall in the ground offered cover and concealment to attacking detachments and

1. It was in this race-course that the chariot race of the Hollywood film *Ben Hur* was filmed.

1. With the decline of Roman power Merida became the capital of the barbarian Suevi kingdom until that kingdom was smashed in 469 by the Goths.

could be utilised to achieve surprise if an action were fought outside the city.

The entire city was protected by powerful walls and towers. Within the city, on the bank of the Guadiana and covering the Roman bridge, rose a citadel with massive battlements from Roman times, signs of which are still there for visitors to see. Within the citadel a sloping passage led down to a small subterranean reservoir level with the river which was automatically filled by the water of the flowing river. The city as a whole made a formidable fortress, and within the city the citadel, measuring about 150 yards by 150 yards, was like a fort within the fort, a hard nut indeed for anyone to crack.

Musa was well informed about the concentration of Christian forces in Merida and the strength and fortifications of the city. He had no doubt in his mind that it would be a difficult objective to capture. To the west of Seville lay the less well defended south-western region of Spain which he could take with relative ease and where his operations would be rewarded with ample booty. But Musa refused to be tempted with easier objectives. They would fall anyway, and even more easily after the hard nut of Merida had been cracked. Moreover, he sought battle.

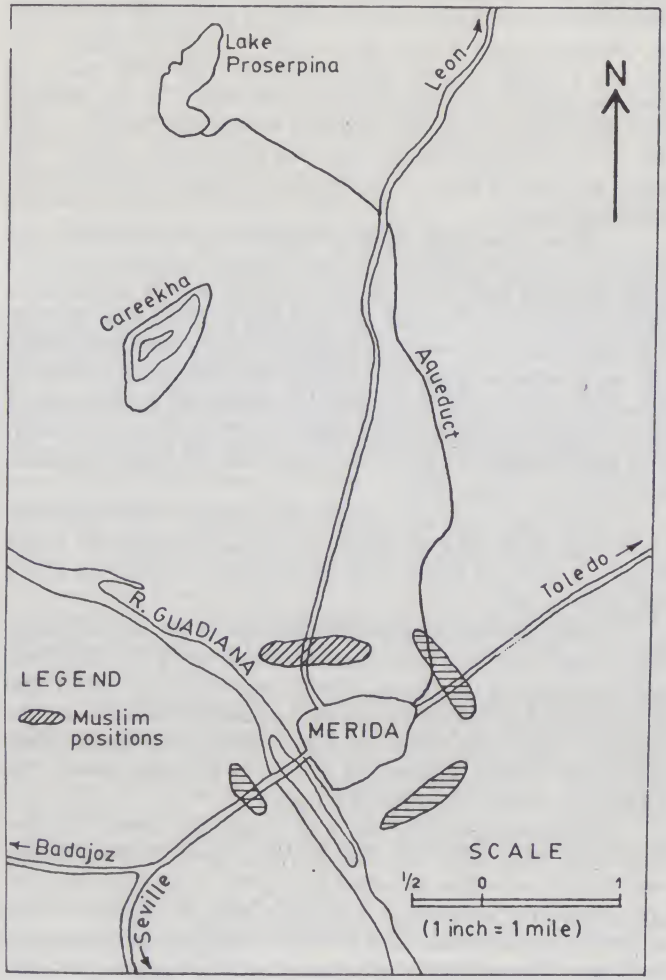
That prospect appealed to his soldiers' heart and that is what he had come to Spain for. Consequently, he chose Merida as his next objective, knowing that it would not be an easy prize to win.

The Muslims approached Merida in about November 712. To their surprise they found a sizable army barring their path south of the Guadiana, about a mile from the city. Duke Sacarus and his warriors were by no means overawed by the Muslims; they had come out for a trial of strength. They would, they hoped, defeat and drive the Muslims away. The Goths were clearly spoiling for a fight.

Musa was not the man to disappoint them; he gave them what they had come for. The day after the two armies established contact he attacked the Goths, and before the day had ended they were moving steadily back to Merida. It was an orderly withdrawal. They got back safely to the defences of their city, where they would take on the Muslims with the advantage of fortifications. Their spirits were not dimmed by

their encounter with the Muslims and their failure to prevent them from closing up with the city's defences.

MAP 7 : SIEGE OF MERIDA



The Muslims arrived at the gates of Merida. They offered the Christians the usual choice: Islam, the Jizya or the sword. Sacarus chose the sword.

Musa disposed his army in several divisions around the north-eastern arc of the city. He also placed detachments south of the river to cover the bridge and prevent supplies and reinforcements from getting to the beleaguered garrison. Thus, some time in November 712 (Safer 93 Hijri), began the siege of Merida.

It was not a dull and dreary siege, as many sieges are. It was a lively and bloody one. There were several gates in the protective wall of Merida and for a number of weeks bitter fighting took place in the vicinity of these gates. There were almost daily combats between units of opposing sides. At times the Muslims would assault the gates and the Goths would come out to fight. At times the Goths would make a sally from the fortress and the Muslims would push them back. It was a healthy give and take with both armies fighting bravely and taking casualties.

The heaviest fighting took place on the north side of the city where there was a weak spot in the wall which attracted the attackers' attention.[1] At this spot, near a gate, battle became an almost daily routine, even the timing of the combat which usually began at dawn. It was this routine which gave Musa the idea of drawing the garrison away from the protection of its fortifications and crushing it in the open. He carried out a detailed reconnaissance of the place and prepared his plans.

One morning the Muslims attacked this part of the wall. The Goths rushed out of the gate and heavy fighting resulted. The Muslims were slowly pushed back. When the defenders saw that the attackers were not making an effort to get closer to the city, they broke contact and returned to the fortress. The engagement ended, like many others before it.

That night Musa positioned a strong force of cavalry behind a low hill some distance from the gate. It is not known where exactly this place was; in the undulating ground north and north-east of Merida it could have been almost anywhere, but it would be less than a mile from the city. The cavalry

1. The existence of this weak spot is known; its exact location is not.

positioned here was concealed from view, and would remain hidden until Musa gave the signal for action.

The following morning at dawn a large Muslim group again attacked the gate. As expected, a Gothic force came out of the gate to oppose the Muslims and the usual slash and thrust of combat began. But this time, to the surprise of the defenders, soon after the fighting had started the Muslim group began to break up and with cries of fear and confusion started to fall back. The Muslims seemed completely disorganised and soon turned into a rabble, retreating hastily from the city.

The Goths had not seen such a happy day. They were jubilant at what they saw as clear signs of disintegration in their enemy's ranks. More of them came out of the city and with cries of joy rushed in pursuit of their disorganised foe. With the destruction of this sizable Muslim force they would gain a decisive advantage in their struggle against the invaders. General Sacarus did not know that this manoeuvre was planned by General Musa. This was the first time that the wily Goth fell into the wily Arab's trap.

The movement continued, with the Muslims falling back with every sign of a breakdown in order and discipline. The Goths came on, not inflicting many casualties but apparently driving the Muslims ahead of them. Thus the two forces moved on, without the Goths noticing that they were getting farther and farther away from their fortifications. When they had got abreast of the hill where the Muslim cavalry lay in wait, Musa gave the signal.

Like a neatly practised battle drill the Muslims being driven back by the Goths turned and held their pursuers. At the same time the cavalry regiments positioned behind the hill broke cover and charged at the Gothic flank. As they made contact, the Muslim force in front also attacked the Goths who now found themselves assailed in front and flank. Some Muslim squadrons manoeuvred behind the Goths to cut their line of retreat.

This day saw the most vicious and most bloody fighting in the Battle of Merida. The battle raged for many hours. Brave men struggled mightily in combat, urged on by intrepid officers, the Muslims determined to annihilate the Goths, the Goths determined to not let that happen, Muslims

and Christians performing feats of valour. The Christians fought with the courage of desperation, but it could not last. The Gothic force was cut to pieces. Very few got back to the safety of the city, to rue the day they let themselves be lured into the trap. The Muslims, too, suffered heavily in this battle — a tribute to the skill and tenacity of the Gothic warriors. A large number of the faithful fell as martyrs.

This was a brilliant attempt to bring the siege to an end and resulted in the destruction of a large part of the garrison, but it had not met with total success. The Muslims had not been able to get across the fortifications, which had been the culminating point of the plan devised by Musa. A terrible blow had been inflicted on the defenders but victory still eluded the Muslims. They were still outside and the Goths still inside, under their valiant general, in sufficient numbers and with sufficient courage to continue resistance. In fact, Gothic determination to fight on was hardened rather than weakened by the debacle outside the walls of Merida.

The winter set in. The Christians would no longer come out to fight in the open and the occasional attempts made by the Muslims to breach the defences were foiled by the defenders. The fighting died down. It was obvious that the issue would not be decided during the winter.

Musa used his time to prepare siege equipment, including a large testudo which he would use as the weather improved. He also sent off some columns to overcome minor opposition at other places and to deal with a serious insurrection at Seville. These operations are described in the next chapter.

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Several months passed. Musa ordered, and received, some reinforcements from North Africa whose arrival was good for the Muslims and bad for the Christians. It raised the spirits of one and depressed the spirits of the other.

In about May combat activity was resumed at Merida. The Goths did not regard themselves as defeated and Duke Sacarus had no intention of giving up the struggle. The Muslims again attacked the towers and attempted to effect a breach in the wall but were repulsed every time. The Goths

would often come out of the gates to fight off the attackers and were able to maintain their defences in good condition. There was again fierce fighting with both sides taking casualties, but the stalemate continued.

Musa now decided to attempt a breach in one of the towers which he judged as suitable for gaining entry into the city. He had a large testudo constructed for the purpose. This equipment was like an enormous shield carried by a party of men over their heads as they approached the wall of the fort. It gave protection against arrows and other missiles hurled at them from the battlements. Under the cover of the testudo a breaching party could approach the fort and either smash through a gate with a battering ram or break down the wall with pickaxes and sledge hammers.

A party of Muslim engineers advanced under the testudo and got to the tower. They began to work on the wall with their implements to break and remove the large stones of which the wall was constructed. The Goths could do nothing to interfere with the attempt because of the testudo but they were able with their bows to keep other Muslim units away from the fort.

The work of the engineers progressed satisfactorily for some hours. They were able to dislodge a sufficient number of stones to make an opening in the outer wall of the tower. As they entered the breach they found another wall inside which barred their way. They began to work on this wall too.

Then they stopped to rest. It was exhausting work. They put down their tools and relaxed, their vigilance dulled by their fatigue. At this moment of neglect they were rushed by the Goths.

The Goths came out by a gate near the tower and took the Muslim party in flank and rear. The engineers picked up their weapons in haste and turned to face their attackers, but in their tired state, heavily outnumbered and taken completely by surprise, they fought at a grave disadvantage, A desperate struggle ensued but it did not last long. Most of the Muslims were killed, very few getting away to join their comrades.

Because of the carnage of this action the Muslims named the place "the Tower of Martyrs." It was the last military action in the Battle of Merida.[1]

It was now early July (nearing the end of Ramazan, the Muslim month of fasting). Not much had happened for some weeks, perhaps due to the fast. The Muslims had fared badly in their last attempt to breach the tower but they had ample time and ample patience. In fact, time was on their side. They just had to watch and wait for the garrison to be starved into submission.

The Goths on the other hand were suffering grievously from lack of provisions. The siege had lasted seven months. They were brave men but there was no hope of relief from outside and they were not getting stronger inside. The arrival of Muslim reinforcements from North Africa had confirmed their fears that the invaders were here to stay. Duke Sacarus was a man of honour and courage and was not going to bow his head in humiliation or accept a dishonourable peace, but the sight of Muslim camps stretching across the plain outside the city was a grim reminder of the seriousness of the situation.

Thus it is not surprising that the two sides agreed to talks. According to one account it was the Muslims who proposed negotiatons, according to another it was the Goths. Whatever the truth, recourse to negotiation was accepted as between two undefeated belligerents. If the talks did not lead to positive results the siege would go on. Sacarus would send a delegation of prominent citizens to the Muslim camp under a safe conduct to discuss terms with the Muslim Commander-in-Chief. Once again Musa showed himself a master of stratagem and guile.

On 28 June (29 Ramazan) the Christian delegation came to the Muslim headquarters to meet the Muslim general. They were deeply impressed by what they saw: a big, heavily-built man of venerable countenance with white hair and a long, white beard, obviously full of years and wisdom.

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1. The name of this tower is still remembered in Merida but its location is not known.

The two sides talked. They discussed possible terms of peace but found no common ground. They agreed, however, to resume talks the next day. With that arrangement the Gothic leaders returned to the city.

On the following day the same delegates came to the Muslim camp to confront the Muslim general. They were astonished at what they saw: a big, heavily-built man of imposing appearance, obviously the same one, but with hair and beard of a flaming red colour. It took them some time to get over their astonishment and start the talks. But again there was no agreement, and again they decided to meet the next day.

The next day was the *Id-ul-Fitr,* Shawwal the 1st, the day of the Muslim feast commemorating the ending of the month of fasting. Early in the morning the same Goths came to the Muslim camp for talks, and this time they were dumbfounded. The big, heavily-built Muslim Commander-in-Chief had black hair and a black beard. He looked quite a young man.

The custom of dying the hair and beard which was practised by many races was not known to the Goths. They had never seen or heard of it. The Gothic delegates could not understand what was happening to the Muslim Commander-in-Chief; and this time there was very little talking. The Goths could not bring themselves to discuss anything seriously and made haste to return to the city.

Within the city an anxious populace awaited the return of the delegates. They were hoping and praying for a quick end to the struggle which had tried them sorely. Then the delegates arrived with a puzzled look in their eyes.

They were of one mind when they spoke to the Duke and the prominent citizens gathered around him: "We are fighting prophets who can change their appearance at will, who can transform themselves into any shape they desire and who grow young after having been old. Their king was an old man who has now become young again. It is our opinion that we should go to him and give him whatever he demands, for we do riot have the strength to resist him."[1]

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p.270; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.15.

The modern reader might regard this episode as comical, too comical perhaps to be authentic. But it should not be forgotten that in the 8th Century everybody believed in magic and fairies and demons in physical form, and gullible people were easily taken in by such stratagems. Moreover, this was one factor which led to the end of the siege, the others being the sorry state of affairs in Merida and the lack of any hope of relief.

Whatever the cause, Duke Sacarus came to the decision that further resistance was futile. The best prospects of survival for the garrison and the citizens of Merida lay in a negotiated peace. This view was also shared by the people and their leaders. Thus peace was concluded and the terms drawn up for a treaty which was signed by Musa bin Nusair for the Muslims and Duke Sacarus for the Goths.

The gates of Merida were thrown open. The Muslims entered the city as conquerors. All the citizens of Merida remained free and continued to live as before in possession of their property, as honourable citizens, but subject to the Muslim authority. The Muslims would take the possessions of those who had fled the city and those who had fallen in battle outside the city, also the treasures of the churches. Nothing else would be touched.

The Muslims also imposed the condition of hostages as a guarantee of good behaviour. This had become necessary because of the revolt of the citizens of Seville and their killing of the Muslim soldiers left by Musa in that city. The hostages taken were from the best families of Merida and included Agela, the young and beautiful queen of the Goths. She will appear again in our story.

Merida was occupied on June 30, 712 (1 Shawwal 1, 94 Hijri). It had been a hard siege, fiercely contested and honourably concluded. The Goths had fought bravely, with a determination and tenacity typical of their race, but they were fairly and squarely beaten to a state where they preferred peace to a continuation of hostilities.

For the Muslims it was a fine, if qualified, victory; a rich prize which brought honour to Muslim arms. It was the hardest battle fought by Musa in Spain and one of the hardest in his long and distinguished military career. But there was no time to waste on celebration. He had to go on to settle

accounts with his restive subordinate, Tariq bin Ziyad, who awaited his Chief at Toledo.

Before we take up the meeting between the two top generals of Islam in the peninsula, we will deal briefly with the rest of southern Spain.

13. THE REST OF SOUTHERN SPAIN

It was some time in December 712 (Rabi-ul-Awwal 94 Hijri), soon after the bloody ambush at Merida, that occurred the insurgency at Seville.[1] Musa bin Nusair had left the administration of that city in the hands of the local Jews with about a hundred Muslim soldiers to assist them. All went well for some time and it appeared that nothing would happen to disturb the peace of the city.

Then a large number of Christians from Beja and Niebla came to Seville. They either concealed their weapons very cleverly or the Muslims failed to check them, failed to notice that they were not like the other unarmed civilians who came and went. The Muslims believed unquestioningly in the good faith of their newly conquered subjects. It did not occur to them that these new arrivals were warriors bent on mischief.

These men joined the local hotheads and took to inciting the populace against the Muslims. The prominent citizens of Seville knew nothing about the mischief which was brewing in their city nor were they consulted. Had they been consulted they would have dissuaded the mischief-makers from their rash venture.

The plotting of the miscreants led to a sharp uprising. They rushed the Muslim guards left in the city by Musa and these guards were caught in a state of total un-preparedness. Eighty of them were killed before the remainder were able to

1. The date of this event is not specified. It has been assessed from the timing of later events, the dates of which are more accurately known.

effect their escape. Seville was once again in Christian hands. The Christians were jubilant at their success, little knowing that, by this action they had earned themselves a painful doom.

The Muslim survivors arrived at Merida and told Musa about the sad fate of their comrades at Seville. The Commander-in-Chief heard the sorry tale in cold anger. He would teach the rebels of Seville a lesson they would never forget. He organised a cavalry division from the Muslim army, placed it under command of his son Abdul Azeez, and instructed him to proceed to Seville, recapture the city and severely chastise the miscreants so that the inhabitants of the city would never again attempt a revolt.

Abdul Azeez rode to Seville. As he arrived at the outskirts of the city the rebels prepared for action. The leading citizens of the city, who had taken no part in the uprising, urged the rebels to avoid combat and parley with the Muslims in order to get the best possible terms, meanwhile making amends for what they had done. But no one would listen. They wished to go out themselves to meet the Muslim commander, to explain their innocence and act as intermediaries. Even this was not permitted by the hotheads of Seville. The result was another battle.

Once again Seville was conquered by the Muslims, this time by the son of the former conqueror. But this time the Muslims were not inclined to be merciful. The innocent suffered with the guilty and a large number of Spaniards were killed before the city was reduced to obedience and order and Abdul Azeez felt satisfied that he had taught the inhabitants a lesson they would remember. The second conquest of Seville took place in about January 713 (Rabi-ul-Akhir 94 Hijri).

Abdul Azeez sent word of his success to his father. It was still winter. There was plenty of time before active operations could be resumed at Merida and after the severe losses suffered by them in the ambush the Goths were not likely to threaten the Muslim camps around the city. Musa did not need all his troops to maintain the siege. He therefore wisely decided not to waste time waiting for better weather but to keep his men occupied by conquering other parts of Spain where resistance was not likely to be strong. This

would also eliminate other rebel groups such as had caused the insurgency at Seville. Musa ordered Abdul Azeez to leave a garrison in Seville and march with the bulk of his division to the south-western part of Spain and bring this region under Muslim rule.

Abdul Azeez advanced from Seville and one after the other took Niebla, Ocsonoba (now Santa Maria de Faro), Mertola and Beja.[1] Leaving small garrisons at these places he returned to Seville and made the city his headquarters. It was now about February 713. The western region of Spain, Al Gharb to the Muslims and Algarve in present day Portugal, was now also in Muslim hands.

Abdul Azeez was not to remain long in Seville, not while his father felt there was work to be done. Musa was still waiting for better weather to resume his attacks against Merida and he had sufficient forces for the task. Meanwhile he would use his gallant son and his bold cavaliers to launch offensives against different parts of the peninsula, taking those parts one by one. The Muslims already had Jaen, Elvira and Malaga, taken by Tariq in his first campaign. But there had been no operations east of that line, i.e. in the south-eastern corner of Spain. Musa now gave Abdul Azeez the mission of conquering the south-east.[2]

The region to the east of the Jaen—Elvira line was still unconquered and according to information available was held by strong Gothic forces. Some of these forces had received a drubbing from Tariq during his operations in the south-central part of Spain, but they were still in good fighting shape and likely to put up a stiff resistance to any Muslim advance. Their strength lay not only in their determination to fight on but also in the presence at their head of a man of indomitable courage and will, known to the Spaniards as Count Theodomir, Governor of the province of Aurariola, in the south-east of Spain, with his capital at Orihuela. The Muslims knew him as Tudmir, Lord of the Land of Tudmir.

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1. Some authorities attribute the conquest of Beja to Musa, before he marched to Merida, but the version given here is more likely to be correct.
2. According to some versions even Elvira and Malaga were taken now, by Abdul Azeez, but the account given earlier, supported by many historians appears more correct.

Theodomir, son of Ergobado (Tudmir bin Ghabdus), was the most gifted general of Christian Spain. A Gothic noble of high spirit and exceptional intelligence, he was one of the distinguished knights of the Visigothic kingdom. He had an unsurpassed military record. Coming from a leading family of Spain, he enjoyed a position of eminence in the kingdom to which he combined qualities of valour and eloquence of a high degree. The count was held in respect and affection in all Spain.

Theodomir had already tasted battle against the Muslims. He had opposed Tariq at Carteya soon after the latter's landing at Gibraltar but had been driven back by Mughees the Roman. He was the man who informed King Roderic about the arrival of the Muslims in Spain, admitting his own surprise at the intrusion with the words: "We know not whether they fell from heaven or sprang from the earth." He then took part in the Battle of the Barbate, during which he played a brave if unsuccessful role. Upon the defeat and death of Roderic he successfully extricated the bulk of his division and evading the Muslim pursuit that followed, withdrew his troops out of contact to the south-east. Since then he had remained at Orihuela with his scouts watching and waiting for the move of Muslim forces into the province.

The Muslims began their advance from Seville early in March 713. They had not gone far beyond Granada (Elvira) when they made their first contact with Gothic troops. Theodomir was ready for them. He had no intention of fighting a battle in the open, but in the valleys and passes of the hilly region which lay east of Elvira he could inflict considerable damage on an advancing force. And this is how he fought the operation:

He met the invaders in the defiles and the passes, obstructing their advance, imposing caution, falling back when the pressure mounted. He harrassed the Muslim cavalry whenever they relaxed their vigilance, sallying out to attack isolated groups, appearing where least expected and vanishing again into the safely of his hills. So Theodomir fought on, from pass to pass, from hilltop to hilltop, always one jump ahead of the Muslims, always keeping out of reach of the main body of the cavalry division of Abdul Azeez bin Musa.

Had more details of these operations been available, including topographical details of places where the rearguard actions were fought, they would have made an excellent study of a fine fighting withdrawal, conducted with skill and determination by the wily Theodomir. He made no mistakes. The Muslims could not get to grips with him, although they followed on and pushed him back slowly and steadily towards his fortress of Orihuela. Theodomir knew that in the long run he would not be able to win in a trial of strength. The best he could hope was to deter Abdul Azeez from pressing his advance, to make him give up the objective, to convince him that the prize was not worth the effort.

Abdul Azeez was not the man to be deterred. He was cast in the same mould as Musa. He was aggressive, skilful, bold and brilliant. Years of fighting in North Africa under his illustrious father had taught him all he needed to know about warfare. While he lacked his father's vast experience of high command, he possessed a nobility of character which even his father might envy. He was not about to give up his pursuit of Theodomir, in spite of the latter's irritating elusiveness, knowing that victory would be his if only he could bring the cunning Goth to battle. And so the operation went on, from position to position, from obstacle to obstacle.

The two forces — one in skilful retreat, the other in dogged pursuit—approached Orihuela. On their way to the town they passed by the site of Murcia, which did not then exist.[1] They got to the River Segura—a fair-sized river but an ineffective obstacle — and continued to move along its bank. Somewhere in the narrow plain on the right bank of the Segura, more or less south-west of Orihuela, Theodomir turned at bay. He would fight the Muslims in a setpiece battle, something Abdul Azeez had prayed for ever since he marched from Seville.

Where exactly the battle was fought has never been properly established. Historians have not specified its location. Local tradition does not give much help to the investigator, in spite of the willingness of the local authorities of Orihuela to help.[2] It is known that the battle was fought in

1. Murcia was built by the Muslims in 831 (216 Hijri) and became the capital of the province.

the plain near Orihuela. Since the old road from the south and south-east ran on the south bank of the Segura and not the north bank like the present Murcia road, it is likely that the battle was fought a few miles south-west of Orihuela, between the river and the foothills to the east of it. This gives a manageable front of 2 to 3 miles with secure flanks, which an able general like Theodomir might well choose for his last stand in the open.

Why Theodomir accepted battle at all in the open can only be guessed. Perhaps he thought that he had caused enough injury to the squadrons of Abdul Azeez and could now take them on in a setpiece battle. Perhaps he was encouraged by his excellent choice of battlefield which gave him every advantage. Perhaps he needed more time to strengthen the castle of Orihuela and provision it for a siege. Perhaps it was just an error of judgement, and it was a grave error indeed.

The battle was fought at the end of March, and it proved one of the hardest actions in the military career of both generals. After a bloody and pitiless struggle lasting many hours, the Goths were routed and the bulk of the Christian army annihilated by the Muslims.

Theodomir was able to save himself. He got away from the scene of slaughter but only with a handful of soldiers. The rest lay on the battlefield as mute evidence of their own courage and the superiority of the Muslim fighting man. Theodomir crossed the river with his stragglers and arrived at the fortified town of Orihuela. He had very few soldiers fit for combat and was also short of weapons and provisions. But the Muslims did not know that; and Theodomir knew that the Muslims did not know that.

*

Orihuela was another of the ancient towns of Spain and a very strong one, easy to defend and difficult to conquer. Its south and south-west face was covered by the River Segura. Its northern edge rested at the foot of a round hill,

2. At the time of this writer's visit to the town, May 1980, the Mayor was Don Francisco Garcia Ortuno, a fine young professor and an excellent host.

700 feet high, which was included in the town's defences.[1] This hill actually formed the peak of a spur of the Sierra de Orihuela, a ridge rising 2000 feet above the plain and stretching to north and north-west of the town. All around the town was a protective wall with towers to strengthen the defence, and within the town there was a citadel known, then and now, as "Palacio de Teodomiro."[2]

As the Muslims arrived near the city and looked at its walls, they were struck not only by the strong fortifications but also by the large number of Gothic soldiers who lined the battlements, armed with long spears. It was a depressing sight. Having shattered what they believed was the bulk of the Gothic army in the province, they had rightly expected the fall of its capital to be an easy matter. But their hopes were dashed by what they saw. It would obviously be a costly affair to take the castle by assault. There were too many enemy soldiers still to fight, and after the casualties taken by the Muslims in the recent hard-fought battle they were somewhat less than eager to go straight into another bloody action against an enemy strengthened by fortifications.

After crossing the river the Muslims deployed along the western arc of the town prior to taking up suitable positions for a prolonged siege. Whenever they looked at the town they saw its battlements crowded with armed warriors. Under the circumstances the only way to reduce Orihuela would be by starving the defenders into submission, and for this the Muslims began to make plans and preparations.

Then suddenly a cavalier rode out of the town towards the main Muslim camp. He said that he was an emissary of Count Theodomir and asked for a safe conduct. This being granted, he entered the presence of Abdul Azeez.

The emissary spoke in the name of Theodomir. He asked for peace and declared that Theodomir was prepared to surrender the town but only on honourable terms. The safety of all its citizens must be guaranteed, no harm should be done

1. There is now a seminary atop this round hill.
2. The palace has been built and rebuilt many times since 713. This writer visited the palace with the mayor of the town but it has neither the shape nor the structure of olden times. There are some Roman columns and things lying about.

to anyone, no property destroyed or plundered. If these terms were not granted the struggle would go on.

The Muslims had a healthy respect for Theodomir. He was a man they had fought but not subdued, heard about but not seen. They admired him as a good soldier admires a worthy opponent. Moreover, Abdul Azeez knew that after the losses suffered by the Muslims in battle and the strength of the defences being as formidable as it was, the conquest of Orihuela would not be an easy matter—not with a man like Theodomir as its commanding general.

Abdul Azeez accepted the terms. The emissary was treated with the dignity due to an ambassador. A treaty was drawn up and signed, the text of which appears later in this chapter. As soon as it was signed the emissary declared that he himself was Count Theodomir!

The Muslims were thrilled to meet their doughty adversary. Abdul Azeez did the Gothic nobleman honour and treated him generously with traditional Arab hospitality. The two sat and ate together before the Gothic general took leave and returned to his castle.

The following morning the Goths opened the gates of Orihuela and Theodomir came out to greet the conqueror. Abdul Azeez, accompanied by his chiefs and a picked group of horsemen, entered the city. He found to his amazement that there were hardly any warriors inside. There was no one on the battlements and everywhere that he looked he saw only women and children.

The Muslim general turned in bewilderment to the Goth and asked what had happened to all the armed warriors he had seen on the battlements. Theodomir told him the story. When he got back to the town after the terrible defeat in which he had lost the best part of his army, he had hardly any men left in fit condition to fight. He was also extremely short of weapons. So he got all the women of Orihuela together and made them loosen their hair and tie it under their chins to appear like long beards. Then he put long poles in their hands and sent them up to line the walls in full view of the Muslims. The warriors the Muslims saw were these women, with a few men interspersed among them.

The Muslims could have broken their pledge since it was the result of deceit, but they kept their word. The treaty

was honoured. And far from holding a grudge against Theodomir for the deception which snatched from them the rich prize of Orihuela, they admired him all the more for the manner in which he had conducted the entire operation in his province, especially his last brilliant stratagem.

The treaty was drawn up on April 5, 713 (Rajab 4, 94 Hijri) between Abdul Azeez bin Musa bin Nusair and Tudmir, Lord of the Land of Tudmir. As recorded by Muslim historians, it ran as follows:

> In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful. Abdul Azeez and Tudmir make this treaty of peace — may Allah confirm and protect it!
>
> Tudmir shall retain command over his own people, but over no other people among those of his faith.
>
> There shall be no war between his subjects and the Arabs, nor shall the children and women of his people be led captive. They shall not be disturbed in the exercise of their religion; their churches shall not be burnt, nor shall any services be demanded of them or obligations laid on them — those expressed in this treaty alone excepted.
>
> This convention shall extend its conditions alike over the seven cities called Orihuela, Valentina, Alicante, Mula, Bocsara, Ota and Lorca.[1]
>
> Tudmir shall not receive our enemies nor fail in fidelity to us; and he shall not conceal whatever hostile purposes he may know to exist against us.
>
> His nobles and himself shall pay the tribute of a dinar each year with four measures of wheat and four of barley, with an equal proportion of mead, vinegar, honey and oil. All the vassals of Tudmir, and every man subject to tax, shall pay the half of these imposts.[2]

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1. Some versions use other names: Ils (Elche), Ello(Hellin). Valentina is probably Villena; Bocsara is presumed to be Cehegin.
2. Conde: pp. 75-6. There is a little variation in the wording of the treaty as reported by Gibbon (vol 5, pp. 566-7) and Levi Provencal (p. 21) but it relates to words only and not to substance.

This was the only occasion in Spain when the Muslims were fought to a draw, and in such splendid fashion, when they did not take over the administration of a conquered province but left it in the hands of its original governor, their worthy enemy, Count Theodomir. He was the only Gothic general who did not bite the dust in the war against the Muslims but remained an honoured and respected lord, almost an independent ruler, in political and administrative control of the province which he had ruled under the Visigothic kingdom. This privileged state was to continue till the old campaigner's death thirty years later. His relations with the Muslims were so good that he even gave his only daughter in marriage, a generation later, to the Arab governor of Spain.[1]

Following the conquest of Orihuela, Abdul Azeez sent a column along the coast known as the Levant, and one after the other many cities including Alicante were taken by the Muslims. At each city a small detachment of soldiers was left as a garrison to maintain control.

While this column was subduing the south-eastern coast, other columns sent by Musa from Merida captured Lisbon on the west coast and Cadiz in the south, or what remained of Cadiz, for the city had been destroyed by the Visigoths and had to be rebuilt by the Muslims. By mid-summer these operations had achieved their objectives.

2. Vilar: p. 44.

14. THE TABLE OF SOLOMAN

By June 30, 713, the day on which Musa entered Merida, the southern half of Spain from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean was in Muslim hands. All the principal towns had been occupied, most of them in peace, and were now governed by Muslim officers with the Jews assisting them in local administration. The Christians were left in peace to live their lives according to their own laws and customs. There was no opposition left. And this had been achieved by Musa by sound employment of time and troops, wasting neither, using both with skill and judgement for simultaneous action by separate divisions in different parts of the country.

But now it was time to deal with Tariq, to bring that restive subordinate under control and put a bridle on him. Musa had his own victories in Spain to show the world and if they were not as bloody and as glorious as the victories of Tariq, at least they were sufficient to restore the old man's pride. The resentment which he felt at the successes of Tariq was still the dominant emotion. It hurt Musa, outweighing any feelings of appreciation which might have moved him to kindness. He would put Tariq in his place; and he had the strength of personality to do so, plus an assurance born of a lifetime spent as a leader of men and a commander of victorious armies.

Nearly a month had passed after the conclusion of the siege of Merida when at the end of July (end of Shaban) Musa began his journey to Toledo. On the way he subdued more towns, the inhabitants of which readily accepted Muslim

assurances that they had not come to kill or plunder but to rule in peace. Sometime in August Musa arrived at the rendezvous where the two top Muslim generals in Spain were destined to meet, more than two years after they had parted in North Africa.

Tariq had been more or less idle ever since he conquered Toledo and cleared all opposition in its vicinity. He bided his time in the old Visigothic capital, impatient to get on but restraining himself. Tariq was wasting his time, remaining inactive through two campaigning seasons when he could have taken the northern half of the peninsula while Musa captured the south. This inactivity was forced on him by Musa who would not let Tariq move. Musa wished to claim for himself whatever laurels fell to the Muslim lot in the north of Spain.

Tariq was not inclined to disregard any more the orders of his superior officer. He had done so when the military situation demanded action without restraint against the enemies of Islam, but now there was no such compulsion and disobedience of his master's orders could no longer be justified. So Tariq remained idle at Toledo for eighteen months, waiting for the coming of Musa and knowing that the meeting would not be a pleasant one.

Upon being informed that Musa was on his way to Toledo, Tariq set off from the capital to meet the Commander-in-Chief *en route*. He took a few officers and a small escort with him. Travelling faster with his small group than Musa was moving with his large army, he arrived at the halfway mark between Merida and Toledo before Musa. This was the town of Almaraz in the district of Talavera — the rendezvous.[1]

At Almaraz the two generals met. Out of reverence for the Chief, Tariq dismounted from his horse and advanced on foot. He was calm and collected, a look of respectful welcome on his face. Musa sat motionless on his horse, watching the approaching Berber, his hand gripping the handle of his whip. He had made no secret of his hostility to Tariq and made no effort to conceal it now. His anger showed in his face. As Tariq

1. According to some accounts (Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 271) Musa marched into Galicia and it was not until he had got to Asturias that he met Tariq. This is unlikely, and is also discarded by most historians.

got to him Musa raised his whip and struck him on the head. Tariq took the blow without flinching.

Musa then broke into a tirade against his subordinate. He heaped abuse upon him, severely upbraided him for offences allegedly committed: disregard for his commander's instructions, even disobedience of his commander's orders. Then, talking a little more calmly, he asked, "Why did you enter and penetrate the land without my orders? I only sent you to make a foray and then return."

Tariq did his best to pacify the angry old man. After a brief account of the operations carried out by him and the spoils gathered, he explained that he had done all this as a service to Islam and in the belief that had Musa been acquainted with the exact circumstances prevailing in Spain, he would have ordered him to act in no other way. Tariq concluded: "I am only one of your subordinate commanders. Whatever I have gained and conquered is ascribed to you and is counted against your achievements."[1]

Musa listened attentively but made no reply. He chose to postpone further action until after they had got to Toledo.

When they got to Toledo Musa installed himself in the Visigothic palace as ruler of Spain. Here he demanded of Tariq all the spoils won by him in war, i.e. the fifth which was the share of the state (four fifths having been already distributed among the soldiers). He also called for the treasures of kings which had fallen into Tariq's hands at Toledo and the fabulous table of Solomon which Tariq had found at Almaida soon after the fall of the Gothic capital.

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There are fantastic accounts of this table. It was believed to be the table of Solomon, brought from Jerusalem by the mythical Ashban, the first king of Spain who built Seville and after whom Spain itself was named by the Arabs as Ashbania.[2] Other sources said that while originally at Jerusalem, the table had been in Egypt when Amr ibn Al Aas invaded that country in 639. The priests were able to get it

1. Ibn-ush-Shabat: pp. 149-50.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 161.

away to Alexandria just before the fall of Babylon and Memphis. Soon after that, as Amr advanced to Alexandria, the priests transported it to Tripoli, then to Carthage, then to Toledo, always keeping one jump ahead of the advancing Muslims. At Toledo it had remained ever since.[1]

Its description varied with the source describing it. Some said it was green in colour with sides and legs (365 in number) made of solid emerald.[2] Others said it was made of gold and silver, having around it a row of pearls, another of rubies and a third of emeralds, besides being strewn with innumerable precious stones. According to yet others its substance was solid emerald while the whole of it was covered with inscriptions in Greek.[3] There are other descriptions still which need not burden this narrative.

The true origin and correct description of the table is given by Ibn Hayyan, as quoted by Maqqari and translated by Gayangos:[4]

> The celebrated table which Tariq found at Toledo, although attributed to Suleyman and named after him, never belonged to that prophet, according to the barbarian authors who give it the following origin.
>
> They say that in the time of their ancient kings it was customary amongst them for every man of estimation and wealth to bequeath, before dying, some of his property to the churches. From the money so collected the priests, caused tables to be made of pure gold and silver, besides thrones and huge stands, for the priests, deacons and attendants to carry the gospels when taken out at public processions, or to ornament the altars on great festivals. By means of such bequests this table was wrought at Toledo, and was afterwards emulously increased and embellished by each succeeding monarch, the last trying always to surpass his predecessors in magnificence, until it became the most splendid and costly jewel that ever was made for such a purpose, and acquired great celebrity.
>
> The fabric was of pure gold, set with the most precious pearls, rubies and emeralds; around it was a row of each of these valuable stones, and the whole table was besides covered by jewels so large and bright that never did human eye behold anything comparable to it. Toledo being the capital of the kingdom, there was no jewel, however costly, which could not be procured in it. This and other causes concurred to ornament and embellish that inestimable object.
>
> When the Muslims entered Toledo it was found on the great altar of their principal church, and the fact of such a treasure having been discovered soon became public.[1]

1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 18.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p.265.
3. Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 286.
4. This writer could have used the Arabic version of Maqqari, but could not improve on the translation of the passage by Gayangos which is here given without change.

This was the fabulous table which, along with other treasures, Musa demanded of his subordinate. If there ever had been trust in Tariq's mind with regard to Musa's intentions, it had by now vanished. He was shrewd enough to guess Musa's purpose, which was to claim the table as one of his own conquests. Not willing to let the Commander-in-Chief get away with such a claim, Tariq had one of its four legs removed and concealed it among his own belongings. The table with the remaining three legs was then brought before Musa.

When Musa had got over his amazement at the dazzling prize placed before him, he asked Tariq what had happened to the fourth leg of the table. "I know not," replied Tariq innocently. "This is how I found it."[2] And such was the love and confidence which the Berber general inspired in his soldiers that not one man gave him away or even hinted that he had seen the table with four legs.

Musa had another leg fashioned of gold and fixed to the table. It was a beautifully finished work which did credit to its maker; but it was obviously different.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, pp. 272, 289; Gayangos: vol. 1, pp. 286-7.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 271.

Musa had got what he wanted. He now had Tariq put in fetters and thrown into prison, meanwhile letting it be known that he intended to have Tariq executed for disobedience of orders. This led to deep resentment among the Berber tribes which comprised the army of Tariq. They rightly felt that after all the bloodshed and all the victories gained against the toughest Gothic resistance, they and their Chief deserved better treatment. But discipline and loyalty precluded any outward expression of insubordination or disobedience.

It speaks volumes for the nobility of character of Tariq that he accepted his undeserved punishment and humiliation without rebelling against it. He could have defied his Commander-in-Chief. At a word from him his Berber troops would have risen against the Arabs, as their sons were to do a generation later. Musa was not an adversary to be taken lightly; indeed he was a most formidable opponent. Nevertheless, Tariq, as a brilliant leader in battle, at the head of his battle-hardened Berber veterans, would at least have held his own against Musa, whose Arab troops were at this time probably not more numerous than the Berbers. Such a confrontation would have shaken the foundations of Islam in the West, with consequences altogether catastrophic to the new faith. However, this did not happen, thanks to Tariq's devotion to Islam, his discipline and his willingness to sacrifice his personal interests to the larger interests of Islam. He bore the injustice and the ill-treatment with fortitude.

Mughees al-Rumi, an outspoken man who had little love for Musa, interceded on Tariq's behalf. He recounted the victories which the Berber general had gained and the services which he had rendered to Islam, for which he deserved honours and not abuse. But the pleas of Mughees fell on deaf years.

About now Musa decided to send a delegation to Damascus to give Caliph Al Waleed an account of the war in Spain, highlighting his own achievements at the expense of Tariq. As leader of the delegation he appointed the old, venerable Ali bin Rabah who was a *Tabi* (Follower of a Companion of the Prophet) and, like Musa, came from the Iraqi tribe of Lakhm. Mughees also asked to join the

delegation so that he could see his old friend and master Al Waleed; and since his close relations with the Caliph were well known, the request could not be refused.

Tariq heard about the delegation going to Damascus. He also heard that Mughees was going with it. In this he saw a ray of hope. He sent a request to his erstwhile subordinate to put his case before the Caliph, to let him know that it was he who had conquered Spain and that Musa had imprisoned him and contemplated his death. He promised to give Mughees a hundred slaves if he succeeded in getting him out of this predicament.

Before leaving Toledo Mughees made sure that Tariq would not come to harm during his absence. He said to Musa: "Do not make haste in the matter of Tariq. You have enemies. The Commander of the Faithful has come to know about him and I fear for you from his anger."[1] The warning was sufficient to stay Musa's hand.

When the delegation arrived at Damascus Mughees told the whole story to the Caliph: the conquest of Spain by Tariq, the envy of Musa, how Musa had imprisoned Tariq and what Musa had in mind about killing him. Mughees had a lot to tell and with his eloquence he told it beautifully. He clearly stood up for Tariq in his dispute with Musa. This was not necessarily because of any love for Tariq, but the reader will know more about this triangular relationship in a later chapter.

The Caliph wrote a strong letter to Musa. He warned him against any action harmful to Tariq and ordered his reinstatement to his original command. "Do not render useless", wrote the Caliph, "one of the best swords of Islam".[2] According to one account Al Waleed even threatened Musa: "If you whip him I shall whip you. If you kill him I shall kill your son."[3]

The winter had almost passed when the courier carrying the Caliph's letter arrived at Damascus.[4] The orders

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1. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 210.
2. Conde: p. 77.
3. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 210.
4. One version says that Mughees himself brought this letter, but Mughees was to return a few months later, as we shall see in the next chapter.

of the Caliph were obeyed without delay. Tariq was released from prison and reinstated. The troops rejoiced at his deliverance, happy that justice had been done and Tariq was back in a position of honour and authority.

To all appearances there was a full reconciliation between the two generals which manifested itself in a show of mutual friendship and confidence as they went on together to new conquests. But neither the Arab nor the Berber forgives. The hostility between these two fine and able generals was to simmer beneath the surface until the following year when accounts were settled at Damascus by the Caliph.

15. THE CONQUEST OF THE NORTH

The winter passed, followed by the spring of 714. If we take April as the starting point of spring, this would be Rajab of the year 95 Hijri. In Madrid it is said that the winter lasts till the *40th of May,* but from April onwards the weather would be good enough for the Muslims to start campaigning. This time they would take all of what remained of Spain, and what remained of Spain was northern half of the peninsula.

In spite of the hostility between Musa and Tariq, the combination of the two generals was to prove unbeatable. Musa with his experience and wisdom, his strategical grasp and political acumen; Tariq with his tactical brilliance and dash, his colourful leadership and drive, were to provide between them all the qualities needed for war and conquest, for campaigns and battles. Musa was the first to acknowledge the importance of Tariq. He showed how central the Berber general was to his scheme of conquest by placing him and his Berber warriors in front of the advance. Tariq would lead the Muslim army, going from objective to objective, within the strategical design conceived and outlined by Musa, with the Commander-in-Chief following with the bulk of the army to consolidate and organise the conquest.

While we have been given no precise dates by the historians, it is known that the next campaign was carried out over the spring and summer of 714. We start with the spring, choosing April as a reasonable starting point. We do not know the strength of the force which now operated under Musa and Tariq, but in view of the fact that garrisons had

been left in every important town taken by the Muslims and that the necessity for a large concentration of troops no longer existed, the army may have numbered 20,000. About a third of this or a little more was Tariq's division. Tariq was not the advance guard. He was the commander of the leading division within which a regiment acted as advance guard under an Arab officer named Muhammad bin Ilyas.

Tariq organised his command as a light, fast-moving cavalry division suitable for rapid movement, unfettered by a cumbersome supply system. Every man carried all that he needed on his person and his horse. He had his weapons and armour, a bag of rations and a copper kettle, the use of which he shared with his comrades. Some soldiers may have enjoyed the luxury of a change of clothing. Provisions for each tribe and clan were placed on a number of mules in proportion to its strength, giving the force all that it needed for a few days without replenishment from local foraging. Men less suited than others for combat were placed in charge of the mule train. There were no vehicles. And before the march began the men were reminded once again that they could acquire plunder only on the field of battle or on taking possession of cities by force.[1]

Musa's first strategical objective was what the Muslims were to call "the Upper Frontier", corresponding to the Spanish province of Saragosa, on the River Ebro, which was to become the capital of the future kingdom of Aragon. Saragosa was an important centre of communications the capture of which was essential for the successful launching of further operations. So with Saragosa as objective, Tariq set off from Toledo. The advance guard arrived at Guadalajara, which Tariq had taken but evacuated in his very first campaign. There was no opposition. The advance guard occupied Guadalajara but soon after, on the orders of Tariq, resumed the advance in the direction of Saragosa.

Saragosa was an ancient town which had been in existence since the Celtiberian period, hundreds of years before the start of the Christian era. It was then called Salduba. In 24 BC, at the end of the Celtiberian War between the Romans and the local Spaniards, the Romans refounded it

1. Conde: p. 78.

as their chief military station in the Ebro Valley and a cantonment where legionaries could retire. They called it Caesaraugusta, or Caesarea Augusta, which the Muslims wrote as Sargusta. It was a white city surrounded by emerald-green gardens. Because of its whiteness the Muslims also called it *Madinat-ul-Baiza*—the White City.

Tariq arrived at Saragosa to find the gates closed and the city prepared to defend itself. He sent a messenger with the usual offer: Islam, the Jizya or the sword. Within the city a heated argument was in progress among the leaders as to what course to follow. Bishop Bencio, the highest dignitary of the church, was doing his best to persuade the others, especially the clerics, not to rely on the promise of safety offered by the Muslims but to evacuate the city with all the possessions that they could carry, the most important of which were the religious relics and the treasures of the church. But Bencio was in a minority. Most of the others preferred to stay and surrender in peace. The inhabitants of the city too were loath to leave their homes and property. Consequently, the leaders accepted Tariq's offer of peace on payment of the Jizya and opened the gates, whereupon the Muslims marched in and occupied Saragosa.

Soon after, Musa arrived in the city with the main body of the army. He agreed with the decision of Tariq and confirmed the terms of surrender. From here Musa now sent out fast columns to subdue the surrounding countryside, which proved an easy task because everywhere the Muslims rode they found a populace too frightened to oppose them. Moreover, what they had heard of the just and benign treatment received by their fellow Christians at the hands of the conquering Muslims further weakened their desire to fight them. In fact it was a positive encouragement to surrender and all of them willingly and wisely submitted. The province of "the Upper Frontier" came under Muslim control without an arrow being shot. Henceforth the awe inspired in Christian hearts by the rapid and convincing victories of the Muslims in all their tactical actions would be an important factor facilitating Muslim conquest.

Within Saragosa no harm came to the people or their property or the churches. Everyone could live in peace and security, in possession of what was his, and could pray

unmolested in his church. The Muslims confiscated the official treasures and any valuable, easily movable property belonging to the state. They also took the wealth of the churches. For the Muslims the church was worthy of respect as a place of worship. In their simple concept it was a temple of God, not a place for storing gold and silver and gems and pretty idols. So they took what treasure they found in the churches and left the churches intact for use by the Christians. This was to become the normal practice in all cities conquered by the Muslims in Spain.

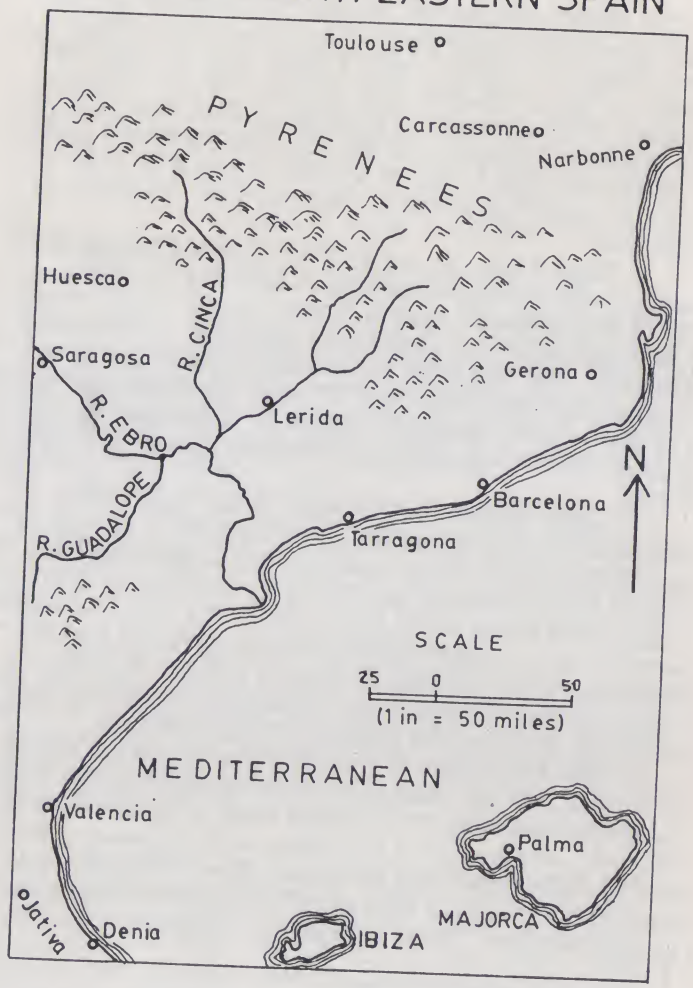
Musa appointed the venerable Hansh bin Abdullah as governor of Saragosa. Hansh was a *Tabi,* and at once began to make plans to build a mosque. In fact his is believed to be the first mosque built in Spain, starting as a simple structure which was to be considerably enlarged and embellished over the succeeding generations. But the Muslim conquerors did not wait for Hansh to build his mosque. They set off for further conquests, again with Tariq in the lead.

One after the other the cities of the north-east opened their gates to Tariq. The better known ones among these cities were Huesca, Lerida and Barcelona, the last named being the greatest prize of the region. There was no opposition anywhere. Musa followed in the steps of Tariq, confirming the arrangements made by him and confiscating the treasures of the palaces and the churches.

From Barcelona Tariq marched southwards and took Tarragona, Valencia, Jativa and Denia. This brought him very close to Alicante which had been taken the year before by the column sent up by Abdul Azeez from Orihuela. Tariq arranged terms of surrender at every conquered city and organised its administration as part of the Muslim state, leaving behind a small garrison at each place to ensure compliance on the part of the population. Then he marched back to join Musa at Barcelona.

While Tariq was operating south of Barcelona, Musa had sent a strong column northwards which conquered Gerona and the coastal district. Thus, by the time Tariq returned to the main body of the army, the whole of the east coast of Spain was in Muslim hands.

MAP 8 : NORTH-EASTERN SPAIN



Having consolidated his hold on Barcelona and the east coast, Musa turned his attention to the north, to what is now France. It was not then France. The south-western region of what is now France was part of the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. Moreover, the geographical continuation of the coastal zone of Spain into the coastal zone of France made it natural for Musa to go on with the conquest of what he regarded as the same region. Thus his next objective was Narbonne.

Again Tariq took the lead. He marched through the coastal zone and got to Narbonne, which was an important city of the Visigothic kingdom. While accounts conflict as to how it was taken, it is clear that a big battle was fought at Narbonne. The Goths put up a stubborn resistance to the invaders but again the army of Islam prevailed and the Christians were defeated. Narbonne submitted to the Muslims with a vast amount of treasure falling into their hands.

Some writers believe that Musa never went to Narbonne, that he stayed within the boundaries of what is now Spain proper. Others maintain that he did much more, that he took Carcassone and Toulouse, even went on to take Avignon and Lyons on the River Rhone.[1] The last-mentioned accounts have probably confused Musa's operations with the operations of his successors. What is evident—and this is supported by most Muslim and Christian historians—is that Musa took Narbonne and probably nothing beyond it.

The booty taken at Narbonne was among the richest that came into the possession of the Muslims during this campaign. Apart from the treasures found in the palaces and churches, they emptied a pond filled with diamonds, rubies and emeralds,[2] and found seven statuettes of horsemen with man and horse made of solid silver,[3] even some columns made entirely of silver.[4] These descriptions of immense treasures

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 273; Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.12; Gibbon; vol. 5, pp. 565-6; Levi—Provencal: p. 18; Gayangos: vol. 1, p.289.
2. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.11.
3. Conde: p.80. 4.
4. Gayangos: vol. 1, p.290.

are probably exaggerated, but what is beyond doubt is that a great deal of booty was taken by the Muslims of which four-fifths were distributed among the soldiers and one-fifth kept as the share of the state. Of the latter, according to the allegations of Tariq, not all was sent by Musa to Damascus.

This was the farthest north that Musa went in his conquest. From here he would turn back. The cause of the Muslim return, however, has become the subject of legend. According to one account Musa came upon a vast plain full of ruins where he found a colossal monument like a column, upon which was inscribed in Arabic characters: "O sons of Ismail, you have come; now go back!"[1]

Musa was startled at reading this. The words on the column became known to everyone in the army and the soldiers came to regard this as a sign from heaven that they had gone far enough. They came to Musa and said, "Where are you taking us? We are content with what we have in our hands." Musa is said to have remarked, "By Allah, if they would follow me I would lead them to the gates of Rome and conquer it, God willing".[2]

The first part of the story is invention; the second part probably true. This has often happened in military history—an untiring general tiring out his men and driving them to the limits of endurance. Musa turned back. This was his only incursion into the land of the Franks, the rest of which he left for others to subdue in the years that followed.

Musa is reported by Muslim historians to have toyed with the idea of plunging deep into the Christian world. He wanted to fight his way through infidel lands until he had got to Constantinople and Damascus. He had visions of building a great highway between Spain and Syria so that the faithful could travel from one to the other without entering upon the sea.

It is unlikely that a man of Musa's judgement and wisdom would launch the army on such a perilous venture. He may have considered the possibility of such a campaign and he seems to have mentioned it to his officers. But whatever the truth of the report it was to the good fortune of

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p.277.
2. Ibn-ush-Shabat: pp.159-60.

the Muslims that Musa did not put any such plan into effect, because very few would have survived such a campaign.

Musa returned from Gaul laden with spoils. He marched back to Saragosa. He had hardly unpacked and begun planning the next campaign when he received a message from the Caliph ordering him to return to Damascus. The man who brought the message was none other than Mughees ar-Rumi, just back from Syria. The instructions of the Caliph were quite clear: Musa was to leave the army in Spain and return in person to Damascus, bringing Tariq with him. It was obvious that there was going to be a settlement of accounts.

Mughees did not tell Musa that he himself was responsible for the general's recall.

*

The Muslims had taken all but the north-western part of Spain, which was called Galicia. By this name was meant not the present small province of Galicia at the tip of Spain but the entire north-western region of the peninsula which included Old Castile, Leon and present Galicia — in fact all that lay south of the Cantabrian Mountains. The Muslims even spoke of Zamora as the capital of Galicia.[1] The name of Castile, in its Arabic form, did not come into use by the Muslims till much later.

This was one of the poorer parts of Spain. The people inhabiting the region were for the most part barbarians, of whom an interesting description has come down to us: "The people are base and filthy and of low morals. They bathe only once or twice a year, with cold war. They never wash their clothes which fall off when they are worn out. But they are a powerful people who seek not flight but death in battle."[2]

Musa had set his heart on the conquest of this yet unconquered part of Spain. He suspected that once he was in Damascus he would not return; he would have to complete his work now, before commencing his homeward journey.

He worked on Mughees. He outlined his plan, emphasised how important it was to take Galicia and what

1. Abul Fida: p. 185.
2. *Ibid: p.* 170.

riches awaited the conqueror. In this he exaggerated a bit, and as a temptation offered to give Mughees a share of what he himself would gain from the spoils of this campaign. Mughees was a gay cavalier of adventurous spirit, never averse to acquiring more slaves and wealth. He acquiessed; he would go along with Musa.

There were two main roads leading from Saragosa to Galicia. One was the northern route which went along the River Ebro to Hara, then west to Astorga (in present Leon province) from where it continued to La Corunia. The other followed the bank of the Ebro for some distance before leaving it to go in a westerly direction, south of the other route, to Palencia and Benavente. According to Musa's plan the Muslims would advance on a broad front in two columns—Tariq to the north and Musa to the south. They would sweep across Galicia between the Cantabrian Mountains and the Sierra de Guadarrama.

Some time in mid-summer (it would be about June 714 — Shawwal 95 Hijri) Tariq set off from Saragosa, to be followed a little later by Musa. He advanced along the river and at some stage during this march occurred the conversion to Islam, at the hands of Tariq, of an exalted Gothic noble. This was Count Casius, Governor of the Ebro Valley region, a powerful lord hailing originally from Tarazona in what is now the province of Navarra. This led to the conversion of others and helped in reducing opposition to Muslim operations in Aragon and Vasconia.

Count Casius, or Qasi as the Muslims called him, remained faithful to Islam, as did his family. It is believed that he journeyed to Damascus with Musa and swore allegiance to Caliph Al Waleed. His descendants were to establish a Gothic Muslim dynasty called "Banu Qasi" which ruled for several generations over the north-eastern part of Spain.

After a few days of marching along the river, Tariq turned north into Vasconia, the land of the Basques, with its capital at Pamplona. The Basques put up little resistance, probably because of Count Casius. Pamplona opened its gates and was given an assurance of peace and security in return for submission and loyalty. Tariq then retraced his steps to the Ebro.

He marched again along the river but after a few days, upon arrival at Hara, he left the right bank and struck out across the plain to Briviesca, which surrendered without a fight. The first place where Tariq met opposition in Galicia was Amaya, where he fought and defeated the Gothic garrison and sacked the town. After this the towns of Leon and Astorga submitted peacefully to the Muslims.

While Tariq was subduing the Basques in the mountains of Vasconia, Musa had left the Ebro a few miles ahead of Saragosa and taken Tarazona and Soria. After this, as he penetrated deeper into Old Castile, he found that the Gothic counts had neither the means nor the will to challenge him. All submitted readily on terms offered by Musa, which they found to be more benign than any they could have expected or would themselves have offered their enemies.

An interesting light is shed on Musa's political skill by the way in which he used the Christian clergy as intermediaries to discourage Gothic leaders from resistance in case fear of Muslim arms and the certainty of defeat at Muslim hands were not sufficient to do so. Bishop Oppas, brother of the late King Witiza who had plotted against Roderic, was with Musa during this operation and did much to facilitate his advance. Oppas was anxious to show his gratitude for the generous treatment he had received from the Muslims, and did so by fully cooperating with the conquerors. He was later to be appointed Archbishop of Toledo by Musa.

The extent to which the bishops went out of their way to placate the conquerors is shown by what one of them said to Musa: "We have found you in our Book of Daniel, where you are described as the hunter of the Basques. You have one foot on land and one foot in the sea. You strike here and you kill; you strike there and you kill![1]

Musa was not deceived by the words of the priest. He was too old and too experienced to be taken in by such flattery. But he was glad to hear the words as evidence that the Christians were bowing low to please their new conquerors.

Marching through the rolling plains of Castile, Musa occupied various towns on the north bank of the River Duero,

1. Saavedra: p. 115; Ibn-ush-Shabat: p. 159.

in all of which he confiscated the treasures of the palaces and the churches. After the fall of Valladolid he detached a column which took Salamanca, while with the rest of the army he advanced to Villabaruz, a town between Rioseco and Villalon. At Villabaruz, to his surprise, a Gothic garrison put up a fierce resistance but this too was overcome and the town taken by storm. From here Musa went on to take Benavente, which marked the limit of his westward advance. On this march, more than in his previous operations, he encountered a people who "lived like beasts."[1]

Musa arrived at Benavente at about the time that Tariq got to Astorga, and here he received intimation from Tariq that bands of Christian soldiers were gathering in the mountains to the north—the Cantabrians—with intent to oppose the Muslim advance. The two generals had driven a broad swathe through the centre of the Castilian plain without touching the Cantabrian Mountains. Musa now took the decision to march north in order to crush the remaining hostiles, who were obviously the last of those who still harboured hopes of a successful resistance to the invading army.

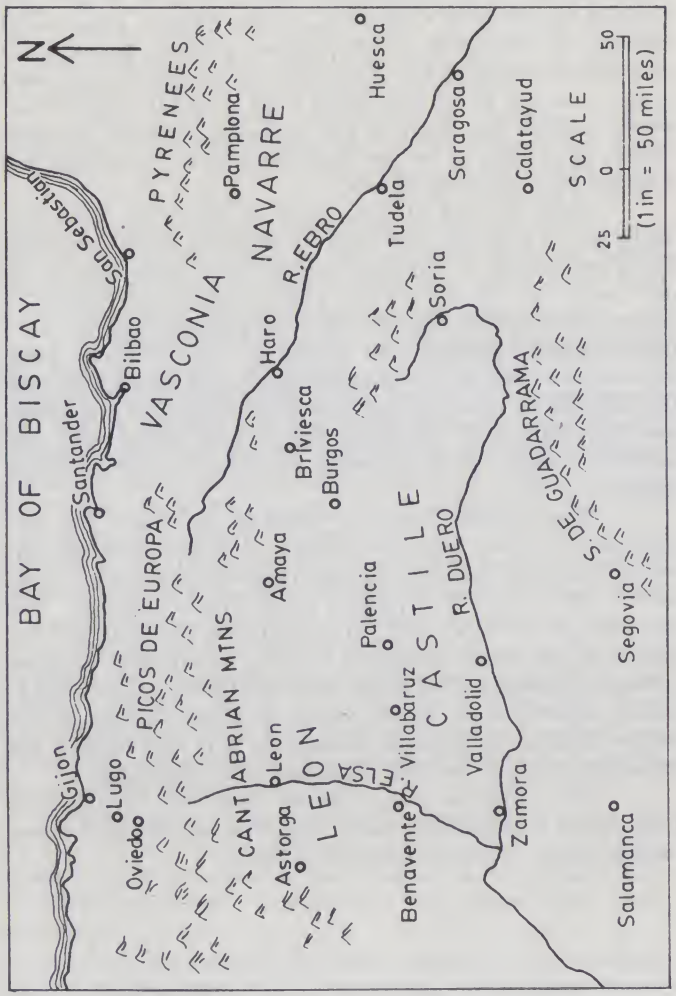
Musa joined Tariq at Astorga and here the two generals set their combined forces in motion towards the north. The army marched through Leon and then took a route which ran east of the present Leon-Oviedo highway. The Muslims got to the Pass of Tarna, and from here followed the course of the River Nalon to Oviedo, which they occupied without opposition. Five miles north of Oviedo, at the town of *Lucus Asturnum,* or Santa Maria de Lugo, or Luk as the Arabs called it, or Lugo de Llanera as it is now known, the Muslims met their last stiff resistance of the campaign.[2]

The Muslims played havoc with the defenders of Lugo. They flattened the town. And this was the last major tactical action in Musa's conquest of Spain.

1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 16.

1. Because of the similarity in names, Muslim historians have confused this town with the better known Lugo in the present province of Galicia. Musa never personally went to *that* Lugo.

MAP 9 : NORTH-CENTRAL SPAIN



Many Christians succeeded in effecting their escape from the doomed town and took shelter in the mountains known as *Picos de Europa* (Peaks of Europe). Musa established his base in the vicinity of Lugo and sent columns into the mountains to hunt down the survivors. It was a difficult operation because of the rugged nature of the mountains with their steep ridges and deep ravines. Nevertheless, the Muslims achieved a fair degree of success. The columns killed many miscreants before returning to report that if any of the wretched stragglers survived in the more inaccessible parts of the mountains, they would no doubt die of cold and starvation.

While these columns were clearing the nearer part of the Picos de Europa, Tariq had advanced and captured Gijon where the Muslims looked for the first time at the Cantabrian Sea (or the Bay of Biscay) which extends into the Atlantic Ocean. Gijon now became the capital of this new northern province of Muslim Spain with Tariq as its first Muslim governor. Meanwhile yet other columns sent by Musa occupied the north-western corner of Spain which now comprises the province of Galicia, with its principal towns of Lugo and La Corunia.

With the successful conclusion of these operations, with the clearance of the Cantabrian Mountains and the occupation of the north-western corner of the peninsula, Musa and Tariq had taken all there was to take of Spain. There was no more to be taken, no more enemies to fight, no more resistance to overcome. Spain now belonged to Islam.

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It was now August 714, the very end of 95 Hijri. A magnificent campaign had come to a glorious end, brilliantly conceived, brilliantly executed. Within the space of five months, thanks to the wise direction and masterly organisation of Musa and the bold leadership of Tariq, the Muslims had conquered the whole northern half of Spain from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, going as far as Narbonne in France. This would not have been possible without the light, fast-moving division of Tariq which sped from objective to objective while the heavier main body of the army under

Musa followed at a slower pace. During five action-packed months the Muslims had marched 2500 miles. But they would not march any more, not under Musa and Tariq.

One day in August, at the end of the campaign just described, at Lugo, Musa mounted his horse. Where he was headed we do not know, but he was not destined to start whatever journey he had in mind. For suddenly an Arab traveller, obviously having completed a long and tiring journey, rode up to him and caught the reins of his horse, ordering him back to Damascus. He was the second messenger of Caliph Al Waleed.

Since this messenger came barely two months after the first (Mughees) and a fast courier would take a month to cover the distance between Damascus and Lugo, the Caliph could not have known that Musa was not obeying his order to return. We can only guess that the Caliph felt that Musa would need more persuation than a single order to give up his cherished design of continuing his war against the enemies of Allah. So another messenger, this one named Abu Nasr, arrived in Spain and rode fast to Lugo. Having found Musa he caught the reins of Musa's horse and delivered the Caliph's letter. It contained a rebuke for the general. And it conveyed to Musa the personal orders of the Caliph: (a) to leave the army in Spain under suitable command arrangements, (b) to return to Damascus, and (c) to bring Tariq with him.

By now the work of consolidation had been more or less completed. All the principal towns of Spain were in Muslim hands, garrisoned by Muslim soldiers, with Muslim governors appointed for all districts. The Muslim tribes, Arab and Berber, had chosen the districts where they wished to settle and got down to living in the conquered territory as permanent residents. Whenever a tribe or clan liked a place it took up its abode in it. Many clans occupied towns abandoned by the Christians. Spain was now fully under Muslim control, another large country added to the world of Islam where the new faith would spread rapidly, at the expense of other religions.

Early in September 714, still the very end of 95 Hijri, Musa bin Nusair began his journey back to Syria.

16. THE RETURN OF THE GENERALS

The year 95 Hijri had not yet ended when Musa bin Nusair started his journey to Damascus, a journey which would take five months to complete. It had to be a long and slow journey because it was like a procession, encumbered by a vast amount of booty and glorified by the large number of captives who accompanied it.

More will be said later in the chapter about the captives, but just the treasure is said to have been transported in 114 wagons which also carried the table of Solomon.[1] This is obviously an exaggeration. One source brings the figure down to 30 wagons filled with gold and silver coins,[2] while another places the coins in 30 skins instead of wagons.[3] The treasure transported by Musa was truly enormous with necklaces of inestimable value and pearls, rubies, topazes and emeralds. There were also goods of various kinds and numberless curiosities, the total value of which would be impossible to guess. The wagons preceded Musa on the journey and the inhabitants of the towns through which the caravan passed gazed in wonder at the marvellous spectacle.

With Musa travelled Tariq and Mughees as well as the Caliph's second messenger, Abu Nasr. An escort was organised for the protection of the column and all who wished to visit Syria or Arabia were allowed to join it. It was a sizable column, though we have no knowledge of the actual number of people, warrior or captive, who travelled in it.

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1. Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p.43.
2. Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p.50
3. Gayangos: vol. 1, appx. D, p.50.

The column started from Lugo and journeyed to Toledo, then to Cordoba, then to Seville. Here Musa spent two or three days making command arrangements and organising the security and administration of Spain during his absence. He appointed his son Abdul Azeez as governor of Spain, leaving with him as *Wazir* (in effect deputy command and prime minister) a distinguished veteran by the name of Habib bin Abi Ubaida bin Uqba bin Nafe. This Habib was a grandson of the illustrious Uqba bin Nafe who had conquered the Maghreb more than a generation before and galloped his horse into the Atlantic Ocean.[1]

Musa also saw to the organisation of garrisons in the towns of Spain. Arab and Berber tribes had already settled in various parts of the country, in most cases taking over the houses and lands of the Spaniards who fought and died or fled or were taken prisoner. These Muslim tribes formed a natural garrison for the protection of the districts which were now home to them. Musa paid especial attention to the north-eastern frontier, roughly a line running along the southern foothills of the Pyrenees. He made this a single front and placed it under Noman bin Abdullah, who would, of course, take his orders from Abdul Azeez.

Having made these arrangements Musa travelled to Algeciras where he embarked for North Africa with a large retinue of soldiers and slaves. He landed at Ceuta,[2] and here he appointed his son Abdul Malik as governor of the Maghreb with Tangier as capital of the province. Then he went on to Qairowan where he had spent twelve long years conquering and administering Africa and the Maghreb. His arrival at Qairowan, then capital of the entire region of North Africa, took place at about the turn of the year to 96 Hijri, which began on September 16, 714.

The column was joyfully welcomed by the people of Qairowan. Musa took up residence in Qasr-ul-Ma (the Palace of Water) some distance outside the city. His short stay in the capital was marked by a public display of the riches brought

1. The course of Uqba's campaign in the Maghreb and the episode of the horse and the Atlantic are narrated in this writer's "The Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa."
2. Some say he landed at Tangir (Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p.43) but Ceuta (Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol. 4, p.216) is more likely.

from Spain and a series of meetings and audiences granted to nobles of the land, Arab and Berber, all of whom were given suitable presents. Musa also led a congregational prayer for rain, because Qairowan was suffering from drought, and it is said that the prayer was answered by an immediate and abundant downpour.[1]

While at Qairowan Musa appointed his eldest son Abdullah as Governor of Africa. This Abdullah was the general who had conquered Majorca during Musa's first campaign in Africa. With this command arrangement all the Muslim West, i.e. Africa, the Maghreb and Spain, were ruled by sons of Musa. Having made this last appointment, Musa resumed his journey to Damascus.

The captives who travelled with the column, prisoners and hostages of both sexes and of all ages, are the subject of dispute among historians. Musa had with him on this journey many distinguished members of noble Gothic and Berber families, apart from the notable Arab chiefs who kept him company. Among the Berbers were the son of Kusaila and the sons of the High Priestess, the chieftain and chieftainess who had fought the Muslims with great valour before the arrival of Musa in Africa.[2] We are told that present with this column were twenty kings (probably big chiefs) from Africa, twenty Gothic kings (probably lords) from Spain, as well as the kings (probably governors) of Minorca and Majorca.[3] There were virgins from the princely families of Berbers and Goths, their "faces beautiful as the full moon," resplendent in their jewellery.[4]

The largest figure quoted for the captives is 30,000.[5] This is clearly impossible, considering the logistical problems of feeding, watering and quartering such a vast number of people on a journey of 4000 miles. The figure has been brought down by one source to 1100, of whom 400 were princes and princesses of the royal blood.[6] The figure of 400

1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 19.
2. Their story is told in "The Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa."
3. Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p.45 and vol. 2, p.19.
4. *Ibid:* vol. 1, p.44.
5. Maqqari: vol.1, p.277; Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol. 4, p.216; Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p. 256.

nobles (not princes and princesses) is more likely to be correct and is supported by other sources.[1] These princely hostages were made to put their gold diadems on their heads and their gold girdles around their waists whenever they were displayed as trophies of war.

There were actually no princes of the royal blood in the hands of the Muslims except for one. This was the Gothic governor of Cordoba captured by Mughees the Roman. Others had evaded captivity by flight and by taking refuge in the mountains or by surrendering to the Muslims on terms which guaranteed their liberty. But even the lord of Cordoba was not destined to see Damascus.

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It appears that Musa had talked to many of his officers about the possibility of a major invasion of the land of the Franks and a march across Europe to Syria. Mention has been made in the preceding chapter of his toying with the idea. This came to the knowledge of Caliph Al Waleed who was astounded at the report. Fearing for the safety of the Muslims in case Musa should embark on such a rash venture, he sent a messenger to Spain to stop him and order his return to Syria. This probably relates to his second messenger. The Caliph even instructed the messenger to convey the Caliph's orders against such an operation direct to the troops should Musa fail to obey the order.[2]

The Caliph was also influenced against Musa by his old friend Mughees, who had visited Damascus after the imprisonment of Tariq at Toledo. Thus the Caliph's mind had been made up against Musa before that general left Spain. Mughees had confined himself in his adverse opinions to Musa, speaking well of Tariq, although he had no great love for Tariq either.

Disagreement and jealousy are not uncommon among generals, especially when they are rivals for honour and glory. When the generals belong to volatile races like the Arabs and the Berbers, their relations come easily to boiling point. And

6. Gayangos: vol. 1, appx. D, p.50.
1. Conde: p. 81; Ibn-ul-Qutya: p. 10.
2. Ibn Khaldun: vol. 4, p.255: Maqqari: vol. 1. p.234.

when we get three hard-driving and forceful personalities like our three generals, a perpetual state of conflict becomes all the more likely.

Mughees's quarrel with Tariq had begun soon after the conquest of Cordoba and Toledo. Tariq asked his subordinate general to give him the Christian prince of Cordoba so that he could keep him as *his* prisoner and present him as such to the Caliph. Mughees refused to part with his royal prize.[1] Over the period that followed there emerged what can best be described as a three-cornered clash of personality between Musa, Tariq and Mughees, which lasted till the conclusion of the war in Spain and was to spill over into the journey to Syria. On a certain occasion Musa reprimanded Mughees openly for something he had said of which Musa did not approve. "Hold your tongue, O Mugheesi" said Musa sharply.

"I shall", replied Mughees, "for my tongue is full of joints and I can easily fold it, until I come to the presence of our master, Al Waleed son of Abdul Malik."[2]

The barely concealed threat in Mughees's words was clear. His close relationship with the Caliph was well known and he never failed to remind people of it. Musa could do nothing but control his rising anger and wish he did not have such difficult subordinates to deal with.

The Gothic prince of Cordoba, who was referred to by the Muslims as *The Barbarian,* was the most prized captive in Muslim hands, and he was in the hands of Mughees who guarded him jealously. It was his intention to present him personally to the Caliph at Damascus, but somewhere during this journey through Africa he was lost to Mughees, and lost for that matter to the Muslims too.

Tariq had not reconciled himself to letting Mughees gain special honour with the Caliph by presenting him with a prince of the royal blood and being the only man to do so. He spoke to Musa, prodding him into action.

"Is he to return to Damascus," said Tariq, "with a prince of Andalus in his hands while there is no such person in ours? What honour will we receive after that?"

1. Maqqari: vol. 3; p.13; Gayangos: vol. 2, p.15.
2. Maqqari: vol. 3, p.14; Gayangos: vol. 2, p.17.

It did not take much to inflame Musa's desire to possess the prince of Spain. He spoke to Mughees and demanded the prince. Mughees refused to part with him, saying, "None but I shall present him to the Caliph."

Musa was not to be shaken in his resolve. He got his guards to take the barbarian away from Mughees by force.

Then some of his officers said to Musa: "If you take him alive to the Caliph, Mughees will claim him as his prisoner and the barbarian will not deny it. Kill him!"[1]

Musa had him killed. And that was the end of the ill-fated barbarian, the Christian lord of Cordoba.

Mughees was a poet who could turn out extempore verses at the spur of the moment with a sharp bite. Upon seeing his distinguished .prisoner killed before his eyes, he faced Musa and Tariq and said:

> I served you both with zeal and yet
> You acted ungratefully to me.
> The east and the west shall henceforth
> See me your bitterest foe.[2]

Mughees's heart was now filled with a deep animosity towards Musa for what he had done and a burning desire for vengeance. Tariq had been instrumental in this but Mughees made peace with him. In fact the two joined together to work against Musa, presumbly on the principle that the enemy of the enemy is a friend. What Tariq did not know was that he had not been forgiven by Mughees al-Rumi.

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The journey continued. After almost three months, on December 7, 714 (Rabi-ul-Awwal 24, 96 Hijri), the column arrived at Fustat, capital of Egypt, to receive a tumultuous welcome from the inhabitants. All the principal citizens came to pay their respects to the conqueror of the West and received handsome gifts in return. They included elders of tribes, scholars and officials. All Egypt gave thanks for the generosity of the returning general.

1. Maqqari: vol.1, p.279 and vol. 13; Gayangos: vol. 1, p. 293.
2. Maqqari: vol.3, p.14; Gayangos: vol. 2, p.17.

Musa remained in Fustat for a few days, displaying his trophies and enjoying a well-earned rest. Then he took to the road again, on the last leg of his journey to the capital of Islam. This part of the journey was like a slow triumphal march through northern Egypt and Palestine, stopping many times on the way to let the faithful see what their brothers had won in the holy war in the West. The fame of the riches acquired by Musa had spread in the Muslim world and everywhere the column passed the populace gathered to welcome the victorious warriors and admire the trophies of war. Such treasures had not been seen before, not since the conquest of Persia in the time of Caliph Umar when priceless treasures had fallen into Muslim hands.

It was when he got to Tabariyya, on the west bank of the Biblical Sea of Galilee, that Musa received news which caused him a great deal of anxiety. Caliph Al Waleed was very ill. In fact the Caliph was dying. His brother Sulaiman was heir apparent and could not wait to mount the caliphal throne. There was little love lost between the two brothers. Al Waleed wanted Musa to get to Damascus while he lived so that the trophies and treasures which Musa was bringing would be delivered to him and not go to his brother. Sulaiman was no less anxious to get them for himself and deny them to the sons of Al Waleed. He also thought that if he received the spoils of war as one of the first acts of his caliphate, it would raise his stock in the eyes of his subjects.

At Tabariyya Musa received a letter from the Caliph urging him to hurry. At the same time he received one from Sulaiman telling him to tarry so as to arrive after the death of Al Waleed, which event was known to be imminent. Musa found himself on the horns of a dilemma. If he hastened his march and Al Waleed died in the meantime, he would get no mercy from Sulaiman. If he delayed his journey in order to let Al Waleed die, and Al Waleed survived his illness to live on, he would get no mercy from him. It was a difficult choice; a perilous option.

Musa told the messenger of Sulaiman that it would not be like him to slow his pace because such an act would mean disloyalty to the reigning sovereign. And he marched on with his captives and his spoils, quickening his pace.

Musa was to arrive at Damascus while the Caliph still lived and was in reasonably good condition. He may have guessed that Tariq and Mughees, who had gone on ahead, would have met the Caliph and given him their version of events in Spain. What he did not know was that when Sulaiman's messenger conveyed Musa's reply to him, the heir apparent had said: "By Allah, once I get him, I shall crucify him!"[1]

1. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p. 20; Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 211.

17. JUDGEMENT AT DAMASCUS

Tariq and Mughees got to Damascus ahead of Musa. Some time before its arrival at Tabariyya they left the column and rode on ahead. No sooner had they arrived at Damascus than they went to see the ruler of the Muslim world and make their report.

Caliph Al Waleed was well disposed towards both of them. Mughees was a childhood friend and trusted companion whose sparkling wit and lively humour he always enjoyed. As for Tariq, the Caliph had heard so much about him — and not only from Mughees — that he was anxious to meet the renowned soldier and conqueror of Spain. The Caliph was glad to welcome the two generals; he received them with joy and did them honour.

Tariq gave the Caliph an account of his deeds in Spain, the victories of the Muslims, the defeats of the infidels, the services rendered by him and the warriors of Islam. He told the Caliph about the spoils gained by the conquerors and the famed table of Solomon, how it came into his hands and how Musa took it away and now claimed it as one of his own acquisitions. He said nothing about the leg of the table which he had removed and which was even now secreted in his baggage.

To prove the veracity of what he stated, Tariq asked that the testimony of the Muslim soldiers be taken regarding his achievements in Africa and Spain. From them the Caliph could ascertain the truth of his words. "Nay," he went on,

"even of our enemies, the Christians, he might safely enquire if they have ever found me cowardly, cruel or covetous".[1]

The Caliph was highly pleased with the Berber general. He assured him that he was well aware of events in Spain, that he was convinced of the uprightness of character, good conduct and ample courage of his general and abundantly satisfied with the services rendered by him.

Mughees also gave an account of the events in Spain, more or less confirming what Tariq had said. Apart from the story of the table he also brought up the matter of the barbarian lord of Cordoba, the only prince of the royal blood to fall into Muslim hands. He narrated the story of how he had captured the prince and how Musa snatched him away and killed him. Mughees put his eloquence into full play. Furthermore, he went on to accuse Musa of embezzlement, picking out incidents relating to the handling of spoils which reflected adversely on Musa. "He has appropriated a diamond of such great value," Mughees added, "that kings have not possessed the likes of it since the conquest of Persia."[2]

The two veterans of Spain also went and saw the heir apparent, Sulaiman, brother of Caliph Al Waleed. They knew, as did everybody else in Syria, that the Caliph was dying and before long the world of Islam would have Sulaiman as its new ruler. Sulaiman himself was counting the days till that happened. So Tariq and Mughees thought it wise to see Sulaiman, in case Al Waleed did not live long enough to receive Musa and it fell to his brother's lot to do so.

They told Sulaiman what they had told the Caliph. The heir apparent believed every word of what they said. Having heard from his messenger how Musa had rejected his call to delay his arrival in Damascus, Sulaiman was boiling with rage, impatient to get his hands on Musa. Everything that he heard against Musa was like music to his ears.

Meanwhile, Musa was marching to the capital of Syria. He was approaching Damascus like a returning hero, laden with spoils and glory, a conqueror of new lands and new peoples. He was coming with the expectation of a tumultuous welcome from an adoring public and an honourable reception from a grateful monarch. He would dazzle the Caliph with the

1. Conde: p. 82.
2. Maqqari: vol. 1, p.280; Gayangos: vol. 1, p.293.

riches he had brought from Africa and Spain, the most prized of which, and which Musa claimed as his own conquest, was the table of Solomon. He had already sent the Caliph a written account of his victories and the part he himself had played in them. He had summed up the account with the words: "These are not conquests. These are like the meeting of nations on the Day of Judgement!"[1]

There is a discrepancy in history with regard to who was Caliph at the time of Musa's arrival at Damascus. According to some accounts it was Al Waleed; according to others, Sulaiman. Most historians give both as possible versions and most historians favour the former, i.e. Caliph Al Waleed was alive when Musa arrived at the capital. This has to be correct because Musa got to Damascus on January 16, 715 (Jamadi-ul-Awwal 5, 96 Hijri) while Al Waleed did not die till February 23. The Caliph was alive and well enough to receive his Commander-in-Chief in the West, though he was not too well.

Musa made an impressive entry. He paid his respects to the ailing Caliph and presented his gifts: treasures of gold and silver and pearls and precious stones, curious objects never before seen in the East, noble captives of the Berber and the Gothic race, lords and ladies with gold diadems on their heads and gold girdles around their waists, young virgins of matchless beauty, and last, though by no means least, the table of Solomon.

The Caliph kept the proceedings at a formal level. He was not feeling very well and it appears that nothing more happened at this first meeting. The Caliph took no action in the matter of the charges levelled against Musa by Tariq and Mughees. He was probably too ill to do anything more than accept graciously the trophies of the West. He did order, however, that the table of Solomon be broken up and all its precious metals and gems be put in the treasury, though this was not done till somewhat later, till after his death.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 285. In the Arabic original Musa used the word *Hashr*.

Thus a few weeks passed with the Caliph's condition deteriorating, the Caliph's brother waiting impatiently in the wings and Musa wondering what the future had in store for him, if anything. He would have been lucky if the future had nothing in store for him. Then, on Saturday, February 23, 715 (Jamadi-ul-Akhir 13, 96 Hijri) Caliph Al Waleed died. On the same day Sulaiman became Caliph and Commander of the Faithful.

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Sulaiman's only claim to the caliphal throne was that he was born to the right father, Caliph Abdul Malik. He had no other qualifications for the job. He was a very handsome man, extremely vain, and known as a gourmet who could consume enormous quantities of food.[1] In his mid-thirties, he was young enough to be Musa's grandson and had never fought a battle in his life; but that did not prevent him from doing what he did to Musa. His 3-year reign was to start on a vicious note.

Sulaiman had already made up his mind to punish and humiliate Musa for refusing to delay his journey to Damascus. Musa's stature as a distinguished general and a governor of high standing – in fact as possibly the greatest general of his time – did not count with the new Caliph. The words of Tariq and Mughees had fanned the flames of his anger, and as if that were not enough, he was approached by a man named Isa bin Abdullah At Taweel (the Tall) who had served in Spain and been the officer in charge of the spoils of war. This man said that Musa had not sent to Damascus the entire fifth of the spoils which was the share of the state but had kept part of it for himself.[2] Sulaiman now had all the evidence that he needed.

He ordered a trial of Musa bin Nusair, with himself as judge, for offences relating to the disposal of spoils of war acquired in Spain. The trial was duly arranged. Musa was called up as the accused, with witnesses present to give evidence against him. The main item in the charges was the table of Solomon which was also brought before the court. As

1. Masudi: Muruj; vol. 3. pp. 184-86.
2. Ibn Abdul Hakam : p. 211.

everyone could see one of its four legs was different and not of the same workmanship as the other three.

The Caliph began: "Tariq claims that it was he and not you who found the table."

"Nay", Musa replied calmly, "he has never seen it except with me."

Now Tariq entered the proceedings. "Let the Commander of the Faithful ask him about the missing leg."

The Commander of the Faithful asked him about the missing leg, and Musa replied, "This is how I found it. I had another leg made to replace the missing one."

Thereupon Tariq reached into the folds of his robes and pulled out the missing leg, which was exactly the same as the three original legs of the table. He placed it before the Caliph.[1]

All present now knew the truth about the table of Solomon. Musa stood guilty. He had no more to say. Moreover, because he had been found guilty on this charge the Caliph and others present assumed that all the other charges brought against him must also be true. Whether any more charges were actually taken up and acknowledged or disputed is not recorded in the account of these proceedings.

Sulaiman turned viciously upon Musa. He gave him a terrible tongue-lashing, abused him severely, brutally. Musa made an attempt at putting up a defence: If the table were not his at least other conquests were; he had won victories which ranked as some of the greatest in the 96-year history of Islam; these could not be ignored. But Musa's arguments were of no avail, his pleading fell on deaf ears.

"By Allah", swore the Caliph, "I shall destroy your works and debase you in rank."

This was more than the old conqueror could take. He retorted defiantly, "As for what you say about destroying my works and debasing me in rank, these matters are in the hands of Allah and not in yours. To Him I turn for help against you."[2]

Musa had yet to discover how mean, how vindictive Caliph Sulaiman could be. He would soon learn.

1. Maqqari: vol.1, p. 280; Gayangos: vol.1, pp. 293-4; Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 211; Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p. 51.
2. Ibn Izari: vol. 2, p.20.

As his first punishment he was made to stand in the burning sun in the middle of a hot day, without water, without respite or support of any kind. It was not easy. Musa was an old man, 74 (76 in lunar years). He was a tall, big, heavily-built man and suffered from asthma.[1] He refused to ask for help or mercy. He stood it for as long as he could; then he fell unconscious to the ground and had to be carried away. If anyone present wondered that this proud but pathetic, white-haired, suffering figure was one of the greatest conquerors of Islam, he did not say so.

Musa was dismissed from all his offices, civil and military, and all his possessions were taken away, by command of the Caliph. Sulaiman also ordered that the fallen general be given in the charge of an Arab officer who would take him to Africa and leave him there as an exile.[2] Musa appealed against this punishment to the Caliph's young son, Ayub, who felt sorry for the old soldier and interceded on his behalf with his father. The order of banishment was cancelled. This was just as well because it was a foolish order. Musa in Africa could be much more dangerous for the Umayyad Caliphate than a Musa kept under strict surveillance in Syria, the home of the Umayyads.

After this Sulaiman imposed on Musa a fine of two hundred thousand dinars (gold pieces). Musa only had a hundred thousand and that was taken from him and put in the treasury. He could find no way of paying the rest. So the Caliph had him delivered to an Arab Chief, Yazeed bin Al Muhallib, who was a close friend and confident of the Caliph, with instructions to watch over him and if possible get the balance of the fine out of him.

Mercifully, this Yazeed was also an old friend of Musa. Twenty-five years earlier, when both were serving in Iraq, Musa had saved Yazeed's life when the then governor of Basra wished to kill him. Yazeed remembered. He was kind to Musa. For the balance of the fine he turned to Musa's tribe in Iraq, the Lakhm, and so strong was tribal loyalty among the Arabs that the members of the tribe made a contribution and the tribe paid the balance of the fine. One account says that

1. *Ibid:* vol. 1, p.45.
2. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 211.

Yazeed could only collect 90,000 dinars,[1] but it is more likely that the entire remaining hundred thousand was received from the tribe of Lakhm. The full fine imposed by the Caliph on Musa was paid.

Musa continued to live with Yazeed bin Al Muhallib. It was a kind of house arrest. Musa knew, as did everyone else, that the Caliph had thought to have him executed and that the possibility still existed.[2] Musa possessed nothing now. Everything that he had, and there had been so much of it, had been taken away from him. He was virtually a pauper, living as a guest in the house of Yazeed. Fortunately for Musa, Yazeed was a decent man and did whatever could be done to alleviate the suffering of the aged general.

Musa was no longer the man he used to be. He was turning into a pathetic old figure. If this breaking of a once proud and honourable spirit gave the Caliph satisfaction, it did him little honour. Musa was not defiant any more. He no longer expected to be rewarded for services rendered. He only asked for peace and wished life would not be so unkind, not at this age.

He turned to Yazeed for help. Could he intercede with the Caliph on his behalf and ask for a let-up?

Yazeed looked at Musa with some amusement. Then he said, "I wish to ask you something; so pay attention to me."

"Ask what you wish," replied Musa.

Yazeed began: "I was always hearing people talk about you, saying how you were the wisest of men and the most knowledgeable in the stratagems of war as well as the ways of politics. So tell me: how is it that you let yourself into the hands of this man after you had conquered Andalus and put a stormy sea between yourself and these people?"

He did not wait for a reply but continued: "You had found security after desire and difficulty. You had earned for yourself a land which you yourself had conquered. You ruled over men who knew nothing about you except what they saw of your virtues and your faults. You had come to possess wealth and treasures and troops and castles so strong that if you had put up even a show of resistance you would not have

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 280.
2. Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p.46.

found yourself with your neck in the hands of a man who feels no pity for you.

"Then you knew that Sulaiman was heir apparent and would become Caliph after his brother, that his brother was about to die. There was no doubt about this. And yet you opposed him and brought about your own ruin, earning the scorn not only of your master but also of your slave . . . (meaning Sulaiman and Tariq.)

"This man will not easily be persuaded to let you off. But we will try."

Musa remained silent for a few moments. The tears welled up in his eyes. Then he said, "This is no time for reproaches. You must have heard the saying: 'When the opportunity is there the eye is closed.' "

"I did not intend to reproach you," Yazeed explained. "Nor did I wish to make you cry. I only wished to clear my own mind and know where you stood."

Musa accepted this, but added, "Have you seen the wild pidgeon? It can see water underground at a great distance and yet gets caught in a snare right before its eyes."

Yazeed spoke with Sulaiman about Musa. After much persuasion the Caliph relented, though only a little. He would not ease the burden of the fine imposed on Musa or return his confiscated property. But he would be allowed to live, free and secure. He would not be beheaded. In fact he gave Musa's life to Yazeed as a gift.

"I give you his blood." said the Caliph grandly, "but beyond that I shall not lighten his punishment."[1]

Musa bin Nusair was now, at least, a free man.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, pp. 283-4 ; Ibn Izari: vol. 1, p.46 ;Ibn Abdul Hakam: p. 213; Gayangos: vol.1, p. 295.

18. THE SONS OF MUSA

When Musa bin Nusair set off on his long journey to Syria he left the entire western part of the Muslim world in the hands of his sons. There was Abdul Azeez at Seville as governor of Spain, there was Abdullah at Qairowan as governor of Africa; and there was Abdul Malik at Tangier as governor of the Maghreb. There is some doubt about the last named as not all historians have mentioned him. Either he was not so appointed and the Maghreb remained under the governor of Africa at Qairowan, as was the normal practice, or he was so appointed and just faded out of history. In either case this son of Musa escaped the wrath of Caliph Sulaiman bin Abdul Malik.

Abdul Azeez was the best and most distinguished of these sons. According to all reports he was an upright Muslim, an able governor, a brave and skilful general, a just ruler and a generous man. His soldiers adored him. Spain prospered during the period of his rule which was to last less than two years.

He consolidated the Muslim government in Spain and put it on a more firm footing with the Muslim capital functioning at Seville. He brought together the scattered bands of Muslim warriors which had been left at various places in a hastily organised manner during the time of Musa and Tariq and reformed them into more effective regiments and divisions. He fortified the frontiers. He streamlined the command structure and the organisation of garrisons.

When Musa had left Spain, Christian resistance had not been entirely eliminated. It was not apparent but it was there. Some of the Gothic lords who had submitted to Musa had done so only to gain time and there were active bands of Christian warriors scattered in the less accesssible places away from the main towns. Their presence became known soon after the departure of Musa and it fell to the lot of Abdul Azeez to deal with them. This he did with speed and vigour. He also conquered several towns which had not been taken by Musa, the most notable among which were Evora, Santarem and Coimbra, all in the western part of the peninsula in what is now Portugal. Moreover, while Abdul Azeez was personally operating in the west, other columns sent by him occupied the mountains of Castile and cleared such opposition as remained in the southern foothills of the Pyrenees.

Abdul Azeez also married a Gothic woman, and this was none other than the widow of the late King Roderic, in other words the ex-queen of Spain. Mention has been made of this lady in Chapter 12 as one of the distinguished Goths living in Merida when Musa laid siege to that city. At the time of surrender she was covered by the generous terms given by the Muslims. She was a free woman, secure in the possession of her wealth, which was considerable. She came to live in Seville, first as a hostage and then, as good Christian behaviour made hostages necessary, as a free woman.

She was young and beautiful. Abdul Azeez saw her and fell in love with her. She responded to his advances by accepting his proposal of marriage. The two got married, under Islamic law. Once the wife of the Gothic king of Spain, she was now the wife of the Muslim governor of Spain.

Such marriages had by now become common practice in Spain. The Arabs and Berbers who came to Spain came, by and large, without wives and families and took wives from the local population. Some of them were slave girls—those taken as captives in the cities and towns conquered by the sword. Most of them, however, were free women, free to live as they pleased, worship as they pleased and marry as they pleased, subject only to their own social customs. They took Muslim partners of their choice and settled down with their new husbands as good Muslim wives and mothers.

They were free and freely chose their husbands who were also free and freely chose their wives. Thus, as usually happens in such circumstances, the common soldiers found wives among the common Spaniards while the better-born and better-bred Arabs and Berbers — usually the officers and chiefs and sons of chiefs—wedded daughters of the Spanish nobility. At least one other Arab, who is mentioned a few pages hence, married a Gothic princess of the royal blood. A Berber general who later fought with distinction in the campaigns against the Franks married the daughter of the Frankish duke (virtually king) in what is now the south-west of France. Count Theodomir of Orihuela himself would give his daughter in marriage a generation later to the Arab governor of Spain. The grand-daughter of King Witiza (a plucky girl named Sara) found herself an Arab husband on a visit to Damascus and brought him back with her to Spain.[1]

Most Western historians of the last two or three centuries, brought up in the colonial tradition and infected by the racial prejudice to which the colonial system gave birth, have spoken with horror of such marriages. In actual fact Spanish girls were glad to seek and find Arab or Berber husbands. The new Muslims, living strictly according to Quranic law and Prophetic tradition, brought to Spain a standard of domestic decency and gentleness not known before. For a noble-born Spanish lady to marry a clean and clean-living noble Arab or Berber was a matter of good fortune. It was a release from life in a dank and dirty Gothic castle and an escape from the embraces of a barbarian Goth.

There were, no doubt, other reasons also for this inter-racial mixing. A conquered people tend to look upon their conquerors as a superior race with a superior culture. Yet, Islam never had a colour prejudice and Muslims never looked down upon conquered nations of other races or faiths. Moreover, young women are always drawn towards valiant and victorious soldiers, especially when the well-known factor of the attraction of opposites comes into play. Whatever the causes, marriages between the conquering Muslims and the conquered Spaniards became common practice and the newly-converted Spanish wives found themselves living better and

1. From this marriage was descended the famous historian, Ibn-ul-Qutya.

cleaner lives with their Muslim husbands than they had lived before.

So Abdul Azeez married the last Visigothic queen of Spain. They took up residence at Seville, in the Church of Sarta Rufeena, which was not a church any more. Abdul Azeez had a mosque built next to the old church which came to be known as the Mosque of Rufeena.[1] This became the main mosque for the faithful at Seville. Here Abdul Azeez would lead the congregational prayer five times a day.

The Gothic queen is believed to have become a Muslim,[2] although according to Islamic law she was not obliged to. Her Gothic name was Agela or Agilona; the Muslims knew her as Ayela. In due course she presented her new husband with a son who was named Asim, where after, as per Arab custom, she was called *Umm Asim* . . . Mother of Asim.

The year 96 Hijri was a year of conquest and consolidation. The year 97 Hijri, which began on November 5, 715, was a year of peace and fulfilment for Spain under the able and energetic rule of Abdul Azeez. He remained true to the Muslim cause and loyal to the Umayyad Caliph in Damascus despite the brutal injustice done to his father. But this year was only half spent when the long arm of Caliph Sulaiman reached across the Mediterranean to get the son of Musa bin Nusair.

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It was some time in the year 97 Hijri that Sulaiman decided to take action against Abdul Azeez and against all that remained of the old man's progeny. He was jealous of the power of Musa's sons and wished to curb it. Reports had also reached him that Abdul Azeez was openly critical of his treatment of Musa. These reports were true up to a point. Abdul Azeez would often speak bitterly to his friends about the injustice done to his father, which was the least that one could expect from a devoted son. But there was never the least hint in Abdul Azeez's words or actions of rebellion

1. Ibn Izari: vol.2, p.24. It has been called Rubeena by Ibn-ul-Qutya (p. 11).
2. Levi-Provencal: p. 21.

against the Umayyad caliphate which Musa and his sons had served with unquestioning loyalty. Nevertheless, in the twisted mind of Sulaiman bin Abdul Malik even disagreement smacked of disloyalty and signified possible revolt.

He decided to eliminate Abdul Azeez. In pursuance of this objective he wrote letters to five prominent Arab officers in Spain whose personal loyalty to him was beyond question. These five included Habeeb bin Abi Ubaida whom Musa had left with Abdul Azeez as *Wazir*, and Ziyad bin Nabigha who had also married a Gothic princess. The letters of the Caliph instructed the five officers to kill Abdul Azeez, emphasising the importance of getting the troops on their side. The love and respect in which Abdul Azeez was held by the Muslim soldiers in Spain was not hidden from the Caliph.

After some hesitation the five conspirators set to work. They started a whispering campaign against Abdul Azeez. The charge of disloyalty in which the Caliph believed, was not likely to be accepted by the soldiers because their Commander's loyalty and devotion to the cause of Islam were only too well known. In fact an attempt by him to throw off the unwanted yoke of Damascus and establish an independent state in Spain may well have been welcomed, certainly by the Berber element in the peninsula. So the plotters chose another subject to vilify Abdul Azeez: his wife, the Gothic queen. Although most historians reject the authenticity of these charges — and they are absurd enough—two of the stories spread by the plotters are narrated below as a matter of interest.

The first related to Abdul Azeez making people bow before him in European fashion. One day Agela asked him, "Why do the people of your kingdom not bow before you as the subjects of Roderic bowed before him?"

"This is forbidden in our faith", her husband explained.

She was not satisfied with the reply. She kept at him, insisting that those under his rule show deference to their ruler. He was so enamoured of her that he feared that what appeared to her as a lack of respect on the part of his men may cost him her love. Consequently he devised an ingenious way of pampering his queenly wife. He had a room so arranged in his residence, where people would come to see

him, that they were forced to enter through a low door. When passing through the door they had to bend down and this gave the impression that they were bowing upon entering his presence. He put Agela where she could see this contrived phenomenon without herself being seen. Apparently she was satisfied with this and came to believe that the men over whom her husband ruled were showing him adequate deference.

The second story, even more ridiculous, was spread by none other than Ziyad bin Nabigha, husband of the Gothic princess and one of the recipients of the Caliph's letters. According to this story, Agela said to Abdul Azeez, "If rulers do not wear crowns they have no authority. I wish I could make you a crown with what I still possess of gold and jewels".

"This is not permitted in our faith," her husband explained.

"But how can people of your faith know what you do in the privacy of your home?"

Here again she kept at him, insisting that he wear a crown, until he gave in. He agreed to wear a crown but only in the privacy of their home where none could see them. She had a crown made and he began to wear it whenever they sat together by themselves in their chamber.

Then one day, when Abdul Azeez and Agela were sitting in their chamber, he with a crown on his head, the princess married to Ziyad bin Nabigha came in unannounced to see her kinswoman, the ex-queen. She saw Abdul Azeez with a crown on his head.

Upon returning to her husband she said to him, "Can't I make you a crown?"

"This is not permitted in our faith," he explained.

"By the Messiah," she retorted, "such a crown rests on the head of your king and ruler."

Ziyad bin Nabigha related this account to Habeeb bin Abi Ubaida and soon it was all over the army. "He has become a Christian!" they said.[1]

To what extent these stories were passed on and to what extent they were believed by the soldiers is not known.

1. Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol.5, p.8; Maqqari: vol.1, p.281; Ibn Izari: vol.2, pp.23-4.

They could not have been believed, not only because the soldiers knew their general but also because Agela, having seen at close quarters the desert egalitarianism of the Arabs, could hardly have asked her husband to make people bow before him or to wear a crown. (To this day Arab kings do not wear crowns.) It is possible that the stories were invented later by partisans of Sulaiman in order to justify the killing of Abdul Azeez. This is also more likely because the soldiers took no part in the crime and remained loyal to the family of Musa bin Nusair. But the stories throw an interesting light on the application and effect of propaganda twelve centuries before the word itself came into common use.

The assassination took place during the first prayer of the day, at dawn. The faithful in Seville assembled in the Mosque of Rufeena. Abdul Azeez assumed his place in front as the *Imam,* the leader of the congregation. He began to pray. He was still in the first *rakat* when he was attacked by Habeeb bin Abi Ubaida, Ziyad bin Nabigha and Ziyad bin Uzra, all with swords in their hands. There was an uproar in the mosque but the assassins made haste to sever the general's head and then vanished from the house of prayer. This happened in Rajab 97 Hijri (March 716).[1]

The assassins, led by Habeeb bin Abi Ubaida, carried the severed head of Abdul Azeez to Damascus. They laid it before an exulting Caliph who could see that his orders had been carried out. True to his diabolical nature, Sulaiman sent for Musa in order to let the father see the head of his beloved son who he thought was living happily in Spain. Perhaps the Caliph thought that whatever spirit remained in the old man would thus be crushed. He had the head placed on a tray, for suitable display.

As Musa arrived he saw the head of his son lying on a tray before the Caliph. For a few moments he looked at it without showing any sign of emotion.

Then Sulaiman, gloating, said, "Do you know him?"

2. This is Ibn Izari: vol.2, p.21, and Levi-Provencal: p.21. But the date is disputed. Ibn Khaldun (vol.4, p.256) and Maqqari (vol.1, p.231) say that Abdul Azeez ruled over Spain for two years before his death, which puts his assassination a few months later. However, the timing of subsequent events suggests that the former date is more likely.

"Yes," replied the old warrior, "I know him as a pious and upright believer. Give him tidings of martyrdom. And may the curse of Allah be upon him if the man who killed him be better than he."[1]

*

Musa's son Abdullah, who was governor of Africa, suffered an even worse fate. Once Abdul Azeez had been eliminated from the scene the Caliph appointed an Arab freedman, Muhammad bin Yazeed, as governor of Africa in place of Abdullah bin Musa.

The new governor took over at Qairowan. It was an orderly and peaceful transfer of power. There was no fuss or resistance and Abdullah retired to live in his house. Soon after this Sulaiman wrote to the new governor to arrest and torture Abdullah and then kill him. This was done.[2]

The Caliph also ordered the imprisonment, torture and execution of all remaining male relatives of Musa in Africa as well as the confiscation of their property. This too was done. It is even believed that the head of Abdullah also was sent to Damascus and that this head also was shown to Musa.[3] And Allah knows, best!

A bad Umayyad caliph could be bad indeed.

1. Ibn-ul-Aseer: vol.5, p.8; Ibn Abdul Hakam: pp. 212-3; Ibn Izari: vol.2, pp.24-5. According to another version the head of Abdul Azeez was sent to Musa in prison, where he said more or less the same words.
2. Ibn Izari: vol.1, p.47.
3. *Ibid.*

19. THE END OF THE GENERALS

We started this book with the generals, those who conquered Spain. The reader has followed their fortunes through seventeen chapters, has observed their virtues and foibles, has seen them as generals and as human beings. It would be of interest to him to know what became of the generals, how fate treated them when they were no longer conquering Spain. We start with the most illustrious of them all: Musa bin Nusair.

Musa went through a difficult period in the evening of his life. After the punishment and fine imposed by Caliph Sulaiman, which left him broken in pocket and almost broken in spirit, he lived for a few months a life of relative poverty. Some reports about the depth of destitution and helplessness to which he sank could not be true, or at least are grossly exaggerated. We are told that he ended his days as a common beggar, surviving on alms from the charitable, the poorest and most debased of men; that out of what he received as charity he would put away a certain amount every day to clear the balance of the fine which he had to pay the state so that his punishment could be lightened; that one of his former slaves saw him begging and out of old loyalty took him to his house and looked after him.[1]

This is not likely to have happened. If it happened at all Musa's state must have been less stark than described above and it could only have been so for a short time in the

1. Maqqari: vol.1, p.284; Gayangos: vol.1, p.296.

very early part of the period of his disgrace. It is unbelievable that his sons who ruled the West could not have sent him enough money to sustain him in comfort and dignity. During the early part of the period of disgrace Musa lived with Yazeed bin Al Muhallib, the man who interceded on his behalf with the Caliph. Yazeed was part host, part jailor.

Musa and Yazeed were old friends and would often chat together. Musa would regale him with tales of the wars in the Maghreb and Spain, as old soldiers love to do, and Yazeed would sit and listen and wonder why Musa ever came back.

"O Father of Abdur Rahman," said Yazeed one day, "how many did you have of servants and slaves?"

"Plenty," replied Musa.

"Could it be a thousand?"

"A thousand and a thousand and a thousand — as many times as you can say that in one breath."

Yazeed pondered this awhile, then went on, "You had all that and yet you threw yourself to your destruction! Why did you not remain where you were safe, in the land of your glory and power?"

"By Allah," replied Musa, "if I had chosen to do so they could not have done a thing to me. But I chose to follow Allah and His Prophet. I could not renounce my allegiance."[1]

It appears that after the horrible episode of the son's head being presented to the aged father, relation between the two adversaries — the Caliph and the ex-Commander-in-Chief — improved somewhat. Sulaiman got over his malevolent hatred of Musa. He even ordered the payment of a pension to Musa and the supply of provisions needed for the upkeep of his household.[2] The two got a bit closer. The old general was often in the Caliph's company, either when he came to pay his respects or when the Caliph went hunting and asked the old general to come along. The Caliph came to realise, albeit belatedly, what a splendid fellow the old general was.

One day at court Sulaiman sent for a plate of gold received from the Central Asian front and began to admire it. Musa was present and noticed the Caliph glancing at him

1. Ibn Izari: vol 1, p.46 and vol.2, p.21
2. Ibn Abdul Hakam: p.211.

every now and then, as if to show that Musa was not the only one who sent treasures to the Umayyad court. Musa could not let the Caliph get away with that.

"O Commander of the Faithful," he said, "you are needlessly impressed with that. I do not reckon it is worth more than ten thousand dinars.[1] By Allah, I had sent your brother a bowl made of green emeralds in which even milk would turn green when poured into it. It was worth a hundred thousand dinars, and it was the meanest of the things which I sent him. And I acquired such and such ..."[2]

He went on with his stories, the precious things which came into his hands — the priceless pearls, the incomparable emeralds and sapphires. Sulaiman sat in silence and listened in wonder.

One day the Caliph was going hunting and asked Musa to accompany him. The old general, now on the wrong side of 75, was apparently hale and hearty enough to go hunting with a man forty years his junior. The two were riding through some property which belonged to the Caliph and saw a flock of a thousand goats, also the Caliph's property. Sulaiman thought that a thousand goats were a lot of goats. He turned to Musa: "Did you ever possess anything like this?"

Musa burst into laughter. "By Allah, the meanest of my servants used to have twice as many."

"The meanest of your servants!" the Caliph exclaimed.

"Yes, by Allah. Yes, by Allah . . ." Musa repeated that several times. "And this is nothing compared with what Allah had given me. There you could buy a thousand goats for ten dirhams. A skilled infidel slave with wife and children would sell for fifty dirhams...[3]

Again the Caliph fell silent, marvelling at the old warrior's words. But the most interesting dialogue between the two, in which Musa put in a nutshell his opinion of his military adversaries over a lifetime of campaigning, went as follows:

1. The dinar was the gold piece of the time.
2. Ibn Izari: vol.1, p.46 and vol.2, p.22.
3. The dirham was the silver piece of the time.

Sulaiman asked, "In what did you place your trust when facing your enemies in battle?"

"In humility and prayer and steadfastness."

"Which nations did you find the hardest to fight?"

"They are more numerous than I can describe."

"Then tell me about the Romans." By this the Caliph meant the Byzantine Empire based on Constantinople, which was also known as Eastern Rome.[1]

"They are lions in their castles, eagles on horseback, women in their vessels. If they see an opportunity they exploit it, and if they are faced with defeat they flee to the mountains. They see no shame in defeat."

"Tell me about the Berbers."

"Of all the nations they are the most like the Arabs in fighting and horsemanship and courage and perserverance, except that they are the most treacherous of men. They have no loyalty and never keep a pledge."

"Tell me about the Spaniards," the Caliph continued.

"They are like lords living in luxury and ease. But as knights they do not hide their faces from the enemy."

"Tell me about the Franks." The Franks, as the Muslims called them, were not only the Franks of Gaul, which is now France, but also the Christians living in the northern part of Spain, especially in Galicia, All these peoples were known to the Muslims as Al Afranj.

This was the nation for which Musa seems to have had the highest regard. "There you have an enemy," he said, "with numbers and weapons and firmness and strength and courage."

Musa then delivered an overall judgement: "Among all the nations I have described to you there were men of honour and integrity as well as cowards and knaves. There were those who valued peace and those who sought war. Some we subjugated; to others we had to offer conditions. Some observed their treaties faithfully while others violated them. And each of the nations I fought according to its character."

"Tell me how you fared in battle against the enemy." This was the Caliph's last question. "Did your army ever lose?"

1. Western historians often render the Arabic "Rum" as Greek.

"By Allah," said the general with pride, "I have not lost a single standard in battle, nor have my troops ever been scattered, nor have the Muslims ever been defeated under my command — since I turned forty until now that I am eighty years old."[1]

*

Musa bin Nusair is one of the towering figures of Muslim history, if also one with a most tragic end. He put his mark on history as few have done, being known and admired in the entire world. He won a whole empire in the west which he added, physically and spiritually, to the world of Islam. He organised and administered the conquerred lands with a talent and efficiency possessed by few in his time. Born the son of an ex-Christian slave, he rose to enjoy wealth, fame and glory which most men seek but few achieve. He lived to the ripe old age of 79, reckoned in lunar years. In terms of solar years that would be 77.

As a military figure Musa was a giant who stood head and shoulders above his rivals and his enemies. As a young man — tall, athletic, strong — he had been a brave and skilled warrior. In his mature years he was a general who marched from victory to victory. It was in the realm of strategy and high command that he reached his true stature and showed his real genius. At that level he was without equal. He had a strategical vision of enormous sweep which enabled him to see possibilities that eluded lesser men. This led to plans which, because they were flawless, achieved total success in the actions in which they culminated.

Musa directed his campaigns like a chess master, with incisive judgement tempered like a noble blade by experience. It was rightly said of him that he knew more about the stratagems of war than anyone and that he never lost a battle in his life. It is noteworthy that Musa conquered Spain during the same span of few years in which Muhammad bin Qasim conquered the Sind and Qutaiba bin Muslim conquered Samarqand and much of Central Asia.

1. Ibn Izari: vol.2, p.21; Sanchez - Albornoz: p.63.

This was the period when the Muslim Arabs got to the farthest point in their expansion to west and east.

Musa lived and fought in a century (the first century of Islam) packed with action and achievement. It was a century of wars and campaigns and battles, of invasions and conquests, of glory and fulfilment. It was also a century crowded with shining military figures, starting with Khalid bin Al Waleed but too many to name, who knocked down every adversary and shattered every army that stood in their path. Of these shining military figures of the 1st Centuary, Musa was one of the brightest stars. Musa bin Nusair was the greatest general of his time.

Musa was not just a brilliant military man and an expert political administrator. He was also a man of letters, an intellectual, a writer of prose and poetry of no mean quality. He possessed great eloquence, a virtue with which the Arabs of the time were generously endowed. He was a *Tabi,* i.e. a companion of the Companions of the Holy Prophet. He is believed to have written a voluminous work on the lives of those who transmitted the traditions of the Prophet,[1] and also a book on Spain which was regarded as principal source material on the history of the country and studied by professors of history and other scholars.[2] None of these works has survived.

He was a man of undaunted courage and unswerving loyalty. He could have declared himself independent of the Caliph and established his own dynasty in Spain and North Africa. It would have been a brilliant dynasty. But he was too loyal, too devout a Muslim and holy warrior to do something which could be dubbed as high treason. He chose not to neglect his duty to Islam, not to destroy the unity of the Muslim world, not to dishonour his oath of allegiance to the Muslim sovereign of the time.

In the last decade of his life Musa's fame was tarnished by envy and greed — envy of his rivals and greed for wealth and fame. This blot on his achievements is a greater tragedy than what he suffered at the hands of Caliph Sulaiman bin Abdul Malik. But these faults do not detract from the incomparable services which he rendered to Islam as

1. Gayangos: vol.1, p.298.
2. Maqqari: vol.1, p.286.

conqueror and empire-builder, one who in terms of sheer geographical space added more land to the world of Islam than any other contender.

After the heart-rending experience of seeing the head of his beloved son on a tray, which would be in about April 716 (Shaban 97 Hijri) Musa had only three months to live. His time had come. Mercifully, his relations with the Caliph also improved and he lived again in comfort and dignity. Then the final honour approached.

In July 716 (Zu Qad 97 Hijri) the Caliph set off from Damascus for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.[1] He took Musa with him. During the long journey the caravan stopped at Wadi-ul-Qura, between Taima and Khaibar, a few days march from Madina. This was a well-used staging post for caravans travelling between Syria and the Hejaz.

Among the many accomplishments of this versatile man was a knowledge of the stars. Musa was one of the best astrologers of the time.[2] When the caravan had camped at Wadi-ul-Qura, he said to those around him: "On the day after tomorrow will die a man whose fame has spread in the east and the west".[3]

His companions, probably psychophants of the Umayyad court, thought that he was speaking about Caliph Sulaiman, for who but their master could be the man whose fame had spread in the east and the west! Knowing how Musa's words would be received by the Caliph and fearing that the Caliph would react unpleasantly to such a horrible prediction, they said no more about the matter. Two days later, at Wadi-ul-Qura, in Zu Qad 97, occurred the death of the old compaigner — whose fame had spread in the east and the west.

Musa bin Nusair died in obscurity a heart-broken man. May Allah be merciful to Musa bin Nusair![4]

1. According to some accounts this happened a year later, i.e. 98 Hijri, but that is unlikely.
2. Ibn Izari: vol.2, p.22.
3. *Ibid*
4. One historian (Ibn-ul-Kardabus: p.52) has put Musa's death at Madina; another (Ibn Abdul Hakam: p.213) at Marr, near Mecca. Wadi-ul-Qura is more generally accepted.

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Tariq bin Ziyad was the brightest star of the Spanish conquest. He was the man who broke the back of Gothic power in the two fiercest battles of the war and laid the peninsula open to occupation and consolidation. To him goes the main credit for the conquest.

His campaign in Spain was like a flash of lightning, a clap of thunder. His operations were marked by audacity and boldness. To him no obstacle was too strong to overcome, no opposition too strong to beat, no fortress too strong to storm. Danger was not a warning to Tariq but a challenge and an invitation, like a romantic tryst whose eventual joys outweighed its risks.

Tariq is one of the romantic figures of Muslim history, a dashing cavalier winning glorious battles for Islam and making the enemies of Allah bite the dust. He was cast in a heroic mould. He played a role similar to that of Khalid bin Al Waleed and Uqba bin Nafe, a valiant knight of Islam blazing a trail through infidel lands. His dramatic burning of boats on the Spanish coast, the flames of which have crackled through thirteen centuries of Muslim history, was reminiscent of Khalid's plunge into the trackless desert on his perilous march to Syria, and, as a gesture, of Uqba's gallop into the Atlantic and his complaint that there was no more land left for him to conquer.[1] Like Khalid he fell victim to a superior's jealousy.

For the injustice which he suffered at the hands of Musa bin Nusair he was compensated by exoneration by the Caliph at Damascus. But this was negative justice. A wrong was undone. Right still remained to be done, in the form of appointment to high command where he could continue to serve in a long and distinguished military career. And this right would have been done but for Mughees al-Rumi. Mughees not only did Musa in, he also did Tariq in.

Soon after Musa's dismissal and disgrace Caliph Sulaiman thought to reinstate Tariq and appoint him Governor of Spain. Wishing to get a second opinion he turned to Mughees for advice. It did not occur to the Caliph that in

1. These two episodes are described in this writer's: "The Sword of Allah" and "Muslim Conquest of Egypt and North Africa."

Mughees' long memory grievances had a more prominent place than favours, especially when the grievance related to the barbarian lord of Cordoba.

After telling Mughees that he was considering appointing Tariq to Spain, the Caliph asked, "How was his command in Andalus?"

Mughees replied, "If he were to tell his soldiers to pray in any direction he chose they would obey him and not regard it as wrong."

The Caliph got the point, and Tariq did not get the job. But the words of Mughees became known to others and also came to the ears of Tariq. He went to Mughees and reproached him for the adverse opinion given by him to the Caliph. He said to Mughees, "If only you had described the people of Andalus as disobedient to me, and not ignored my loyalty."

Mughees retorted, "If only you had left me the barbarian, I would have left you Spain."[1]

Tariq was left out and forgotten. He did not again mount the stage of history. He went back to Spain and spent the rest of his life as a retired and respected general.

Tariq was the first great Muslim Berber general of history. He gave more to the cause of Islam than he received in return. He deserved better.

Mughees al-Rumi was the most colourful personality that took part in the conquest of Spain. He was a man of many parts: soldier, adventurer, courtier, poet. By temperament he was a soldier of fortune. In another place and another time he would have been a conquering general, for which role he possessed all the requisite qualities.

He played a part in the downfall of Musa bin Nusair but he was not the sole cause of it. Musa did not fall into disgrace only for what he did in Spain but also because a vindictive caliph would not forgive him his refusal to delay his arrival at Damascus with the spoils of Spain. Mughees's contribution to his downfall was little more than marginal. As

2. Maqqari: vol.3, p.13.

he saw it, this was a personal vendetta between him and an individual who had treated him unfairly, misusing his authority as Commander-in-Chief by snatching away his royal prisoner and depriving him of the special honour which he had gained in battle. Mughees was not looking at Musa and Tariq from the point of view of history and the great thrust of Islam. He did not see the matter with the hindsight of thirteen centuries, as we do now.

Mughees too returned to Spain, to the scene of his greatest exploit. He bought a palace in Cordoba which came to be called "the Palace of Mughees." Here he lived in wealth and honour, becoming the head and ancestor of a noble family known as "the Sons of Mughees." His descendants also achieved fame as distinguished citizens of Andalus and as statesmen and generals, starting with his son Abdur Rahman who became *Hajib,* or Prime Minister, to Abdur Rahman al-Dakhil, the founder of the new Umayyad dynasty in Spain.

Count Julian, the crafty old governor of Ceuta who opened the doors of Spain to the Muslims, also moved to Cordoba where he spent the rest of his days as a respected lord. No doubt he found life in the new Muslim capital of Spain more interesting than in his small fortress-town in his native Berber land.

Julian lived and died a Christian. His son converted to Islam. His grandsons were fervently religious Muslims who hotly disputed the charge of ill-wishers that their ancestor was a traitor because he let the Muslims into Christian Spain. Instead they took pride in what their grandfather had done and regarded it as an act of merit which Allah would reward.

The descendants of Julian were all good Muslims. They merged into Spanish Muslim life like the bulk of the Spanish population in the country, at the same time retaining their special status as the sons of Julian. They produced a number of scholars over the generations, the last of the notable ones being one named Ahmad, who died in 998.[1]

1. Saavedra: pp.51-2.

20. ISLAM IN SPAIN

We come to the end of this volume. There is a lot more to the military history of Muslim Spain. There were wars and campaigns and battles, there were holy wars and civil wars, epochs of grandeur and periods of disgrace, feats of heroism and acts of treachery — spread over eight centuries of Spanish history until the last tragic act of the drama when the curtain fell on Granada in 1491. But that was not part of the conquest. It will be related in other volumes. Yet, it would not be right to leave the reader with the bitter memory of an assassination in his mind. We will therefore briefly recount the events which followed the murder of Abdul Azeez and which converted the old Visigothic kingdom of Spain into the new Muslim state of Andalus.

For some weeks there was confusion in Seville. The shock waves of the assassination of the governor rippled across Spain. The soldiers were horrified by what had been done to their beloved commander. .. and during prayers in the mosque! Seeing this reaction, the conspirators made haste to depart for Damascus with the head of their victim.

Such was the affection and esteem in which Musa bin Nusair and Abdul Azeez bin Musa were held in Spain that the soldiers themselves chose as their new leader a man from their family. This was a nephew of Musa, his sister's son, one named Ayub bin Habeeb, who had distinguished himself in the war in Spain and earned the respect of the soldiers.

Ayub bin Habeeb was a brave warrior and an upright Muslim, and the people of Spain, Muslims and others, were glad to have him as their new ruler. But nothing special happened in the peninsula during his time. The only notable

events which occurred in the short duration of his rule were the move of the capital and the construction of a castle. He moved the capital from Seville to Cordoba because the latter was more central and facilitated control over the provinces. And during an expedition to the north he levelled the old ruined Roman town of Bilbilis, fifty miles south-west of Saragosa, and built in its place a strong castle which came to be known as the Castle of Ayub . . . Qalat Ayub. The town is still there with the Spanish name of Calatayud.

Ayub's rule lasted only six months. Then another governor was appointed by the Governor of Africa at Qairowan who himself had earlier been appointed by Caliph Sulaiman. The new governor, Al Hurr bin Abdur Rahman As-Saqafi, travelled to Cordoba with an escort of 400 horse, divested Ayub of his office and took over as Governor of Spain. According to some accounts it was he and not Ayub who moved the capital to Cordoba.

Ayub bin Habeeb was the last governor of Spain from the family of Musa bin Nusair. With his replacement by Al Hurr a new era began in the history of the Peninsula. What Al Hurr did, and he did a great deal, will be narrated in another volume.

When studying the causes of great historical events like the Muslim conquest of Spain we must take care not to be diverted by direct causes, like Julian's desire for revenge. There are often deeper causes, unseen and intangible, which operate beneath the surface and impel events towards certain ends. Direct causes are merely instruments which bring about those ends, like keys which open doors.

Had there been no seduction of a pretty Berber girl by a Visigothic king the Muslims would still have landed in Spain in pursuance of the Quranic injunction to fight the infidel and spread the faith. It was this impulse which led to the expansion of Islam under the Holy Prophet and the early caliphs. Behind the military campaigns lay the dynamic religious thrust of Islam, whose elemental power was tempered with the justice and humanity of Quranic law and Prophetic tradition.

The new faith, young and vigorous, possessed a powerful impetus, and until that impetus was spent the conquest of Muslim arms would continue. Islam had a destiny to fulfil, an ideal to achieve. The holy war had to go on, blazing a trail through unbelieving lands, flattening all ramparts, destroying all enemies who stood in the path of the faithful. No enemy was too strong to check the advance of the Muslims, no nation too brave and warlike to intimidate them. Romans, Persians, Turks, Copts, Berbers, Goths—all fell in battle against the victorious soldiers of Islam. The holy warriors were led on by God's promise of the best of both worlds for the faithful — glory and gain in this world if they conquered, paradise in the next if they died.

If there had been no Florinda and no Julian, no Romans and no Goths in Spain, there would have been someone else and something else. The Muslims would still have got to Spain. If there had been no Musa and no Tariq, there would have been other slaves of Allah seeking merit with their Lord. There would still be "Moors" in Spain.

As a matter of interest, to the West they were known as Moors and still are. Originally the word was "Mauri" and was brought into use by the Romans, although it is believed to be a Phoenician word meaning Westerner. The Romans called their north-western province of North Africa "Mauretania" and the people "Maoris". The true Moors were the Berbers of North Africa and not the Arabs, but over the centuries the term was to acquire wider application to cover all Muslims of North Africa and Spain, even Spanish Muslims of pure Gothic descent. In Spanish the word used was "Moro".[1]

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As a concluding part of this book it will be useful to establish what Islam did to Spain, what the new faith brought to a troubled peninsula which had suffered for centuries from brutal conquerors and savage rulers. This is best seen against a background of the conditions which

1. Because the Spaniards associated the Moors with Islam, even in the Philippines, which used to be a Spanish colony until the very end of the 19th century, the Muslims were called Moros.

prevailed in Spain under the Germanic nations which ruled or misruled the country for three hundred years. And it is best seen through the eyes of Western and Christian historians who cannot be accused of prejudice against their own kind.

At the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th Centuries, just before the irruption of the Germanic tribes, conditions in Spain were pitiable. It had been part of the Roman Empire for six hundred years. In accordance with their imperial policy, the Romans had used Spain, as they had used other provinces of the empire, as a source of wealth to enrich Rome and create the luxurious life for which Rome was famous. On the one hand, in Spain, there were the possessors of huge estates called *latifundia,* on the other there were the vast multitudes of impoverished citizens — serfs and slaves. The wealthy and powerful paid no taxes and enjoyed a special position with special privileges which none might challenge.

The rich lived lives of unbridled luxury in splendid mansions . . . "There, in halls rich with the painted and embroidered hangings of Persia and Assyria, slaves daily loaded the board with the choicest viands and the most generous wines, while the guests reclining upon couches spread with purple improvised *verses,* or were entertained by choirs of musicians or troops of dancing girls."[1]

Below the nobility and the rich upper class there was a small middle class which groaned under the crushing weight of taxes and imposts. They were the only ones who paid taxes. Below this middle class of citizens, the rest of the population consisted of serfs and slaves.

The serfs were agricultural labourers, slaves in a manner not of a person but of the land which they worked. They were better off than the slaves because they could legally marry and could even become owners of their land, although they could not alienate it. They were tied to the soil they tilled; they could not leave it. The landlord could not dispose of his fields without the serfs, nor of his serfs without the fields.[2]

The most wretched and most pitiable of all men were the slaves. They were immensely numerous, it not being unusual for a man to possess thousands of slaves. They had

1. Dozy: p.216.
2. *Ibid:* p.217.

no rights whatever and were entirely at the mercy of their masters who could do with them as they pleased. They were bought and sold like cattle or household goods . . . "They were treated with pitiless severity: a master could condemn a slave to three hundred lashes for having kept him waiting for hot water, and what these poor wretches had to endure at the hands of their masters was nothing compared to the cruelties inflicted on them by overseers who were slaves like themselves."[1]

Then came the Germanic nations, like a terrible tidal wave of savagery, leaving a trail of death and destruction in their wake. The havoc they wrought has already been described in Chapter 3. Yet, in spite of knowing of the horror that was coming, the Romans and Romanised Spaniards did nothing to defend themselves against it. They had fallen too low to offer opposition to the barbarian invaders.

Even as the barbarians were entering the gates of the cities . . . "the rich, sunk in gluttony and drunkenness, danced and sang; their trembling lips imprinted kisses on the bare shoulders of beautiful slave girls . . . Not a single town had the courage to sustain a siege; everywhere the gates flew open, as though automatically, to the barbarians who entered the cities without striking a blow; they plundered, they burned, but they had no need to kill — if they did so, it was but to satiate a lust for blood."[2]

The Visigothic kingdom had been established in Toulouse soon after the middle of the 5th Century and included the north-eastern part of Spain. A hundred years later it transferred its capital to Toledo and soon after the Visigoths were in control of most of the peninsula. Henceforth the law of Spain would be Visigothic law superimposed on Roman law.

The lot of the serfs and slaves got worse rather than better under the Visigoths. Some of the brutality was institutionalised by passing harsh laws against fugitive serfs and slaves. Now neither serf nor slave could marry without the permission of the lord, and if he did the wife was forcibly separated from the husband. When one married a woman belonging to another lord, the offspring of the marriage were

1. *Ibid:* p.218.
2. *Ibid:* p.219.

shared between the two masters. In this respect the law of the Visigoths was worse than the law of the Romans which at least did not permit the separation of man and wife or children from parents.[1]

A new element which now entered relations between master and slave was the church. With the conversion of the Visigoths to the Catholic faith, the Roman Catholic clergy assumed greater power in the kingdom, commanding a position which the state would not dispute. The Christian clergy had promised to ameliorate the condition of the slaves once they gained possession of authority, but when that happened fine principles were set aside . . . "Possessed of vast domains densely populated with serfs, or splendid palaces crowded with slaves, the bishops recognised that the time for emanicipating the serfs was not yet, and might not arrive for centuries to come."[2]

The Spanish church owned a large number of slaves and the importance of a church was indicated by the number of slaves who belonged to it. If a parish church had fewer than ten slaves it was regarded as a very poor one and was not entitled to have a priest of its own.[3] Many bishops were no less cruel than other masters in the treatment they meted out to the slaves of the church. The helplessness and misery of the slaves did nothing to earn the compassion of their holy masters.

The brutality of the clergy exceeded all bounds. When priests fell ill they would sometimes blame their illness upon the slaves of their church, alleging that it had been caused by magic. They would then proceed to torture the slaves. This ill-treatment went so far that in 660 the Lusitanian Synod declared that the bishop . . . "must put a limit to his anger. For no fault whatever must a bishop tear off a limb from any slave of the church."[4]

The Eleventh Church Council repeated what had more than once been enacted before: that priests and bishops must not shed blood. They must not put anyone to death or cut off his limbs or direct another to do so. Apparently such

1. *Ibid:* p.226.
2. *Ibid:* p.225.
3. Thompson: p. 305.
4. *Ibid:* p.306.

horrors on the part of priests were not confined to church slaves; the Council forbade them to treat freedmen also in this manner.[1]

So much for the serfs and slaves who comprised the bulk of the population. But it would be interesting to know something about the legal system and how it was applied by the Visigoths in Spain, because in this field the humane application of Islamic laws offers a sharp contrast.

Torture was not only permitted but was an essential part of legal procedure. The practice was to torture free persons of any social class for not more than three days in the presence of a judge. If the accused died under torture and it was proved that this was due to malice or corruption on the part of the judge, the judge himself was handed over to the relatives of the dead man to suffer the same treatment. The treatment of slaves was even worse.

Nobles and high officials were more or less above the law and could get away with anything, not just murder. In the middle of the 7th Century King Chindasuinth (641-52) ordered amendments to the law to bring these privileged individuals within its grasp in cases of treason, homicide and adultery. The accuser had to deliver secretly to the king, or to judges appointed by the king, a written statement of charges with the signatures of three witnesses. During the enquiry by the court the defendant was tortured. If he did not confess his crime the accuser was handed over to him, though he was forbidden to put the accuser to death.[2]

King Chindasuinth also allowed royal slaves to give evidence in the courts without being tortured. All other slaves, when they had to testify, could do so only under torture. The king further declared that if a slave died or was maimed by torture, the man who made the charge against the slave would have to provide the slave's owner with two slaves of equal value.[3]

These are only glimpses, because we do not know a great deal about this period of the Dark Ages in Europe. They are, however, enough to give the reader an idea of the social conditions prevailing in Spain at the beginning of the 8th

1. *Ibid:* pp.305-6.
2. *Ibid:* pp.258-9.
3. *Ibid:* pp. 268-9.

Century. Yet, the reader should not imagine that this was necessarily the Christian way of treating human beings. It was the way of the barbarian because this was the age of barbarism in Spain. It had nothing to do with the gentle Christianity of Prophet Jesus, on whom be peace, who would have been horrified to know how "the meek" and "the poor in spirit" were being treated by those who professed to follow in his footsteps.

That is how it was. It is against this background of barbarian life in Spain that we must see the impact of Islam on the country.

The Muslim conquest of Spain was notable for the absence of suffering and horror which usually attend military invasions. There was no bloodshed, no rapine or destruction. The country was not devastated, the inhabitants were not slaughtered, the churches were not desecrated, the economy was not ravaged, the institutions were not dishonoured, the women were not ravished. On the contrary, peace and stability were restored, order and discipline reestablished, economic prosperity strengthened, the social conditions of life purified. With the coming of the Muslims the land smiled. Spain turned over a new leaf in its history—for the first time a bright and cheerful one.

Under the Muslims there was complete religious tolerance. There was no religious persecution, not even pressure. The Christians and Jews were free to worship in their churches and synagogues as they pleased. Even Gibbon, no friend of Islam, is led to admit: "Yet, if we compare the invasion of Spain by the Goths, or its recovery by the kings of Castile and Aragon, we must applaud the moderation and discipline of the Arabian conquerors."[1]

This tribute, grudgingly conceded, is a gross understatement. The Muslims did not have to compare themselves with the Goths and the Spanish *Reconquistadores* of later centuries to establish their claim to social and moral excellence. The tolerance of the Muslims was exemplary and

1 Gibbon: vol. 5, p.567.

unmatched by the followers of other prophets and other gods. Had the Muslims not been tolerant there would have been no Christians left in the Iberian Peninsula, at least not more than there are Muslims today in Spain.

As a result of this tolerance the followers of all faiths were satisfied with their lot. The Jews were again free to practise their religious rites without interference and oppression. Even many Christians were happier than before because the harshness of the clergy was curbed. Moreover, under the impact of the Muslim example and the justice and fair play introduced by them, a large number of Spaniards opted for the faith of their conquerors. This conversion was to advance by leaps and bounds.

Those who were suffering in Spain gained from the coming of the Muslims. Those who were not suffering did not lose. The vanquished were left in peace to live under their own laws and be judged by their own judges. The Muslims gave them governors and counts of their own to see to their administration, to collect taxes and settle disputes. Territories conquered by the sword and the property belonging to the church and the nobles who had fled were taken over. One fifth of such property belonged to the Muslim state and was earmarked as such while the rest was parcelled out among the conquering warriors. The serfs were left to till the land, from which the Muslim owners took a share of the crop as their due.

The Jizya was imposed on all non-Muslims. This tax was levied in return for exemption from military service and as a guarantee of protection against other enemies. The rate of Jizya was 48 dirhams (silver pieces) for the rich, 24 for citizens belonging to the middle class and 12 for those who earned their living by manual labour. There was no Jizya on women and children, on monks, on slaves or on the handicapped.[1] Any non-Muslim who became a Muslim automatically ceased to pay the Jizya.

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1. Dozy: p.235.

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All slaves belonging to the church and other institutions were freed. Those not freed, those belonging to individual owners, were given a new dignity and a right to decent, humane treatment. Islam permitted the institution of slavery but did not permit cruelty and brutality. A slave in Islam lived much like one of the family. When a slave-girl bore a child it was acknowledged as the legal offspring of the master with rights of inheritance. Many sultans and nobles in the centuries that followed were born to slave-girls.

Islam gave equality to all, high and low, creating a great brotherhood of mankind. There were economic differences; there were rich and poor; but there was no social difference. All Muslims sat together, ate together, prayed together. Before the law all were equal. There was no torture, no intimidation, no corruption. For the first time in their history the Spaniards experienced complete legal equality and justice.

Prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, had said: "I have been promised the east of the earth and the west; and whatever has been promised to me will be mastered by my followers".[1]

So the Muslims mastered Spain. They settled down in the beautiful country and made it their own, becoming one with the land and its people. They would be there for eight centuries, ruling part of the time over all of it, all of the time over part of it. They lived and ruled not as Arabs or Berbers or Spaniards but as Muslims — Spanish Muslims to the world, Muslim Spaniards to themselves.

This was the beginning of Muslim Spain, one of the most brilliant and most glorious epochs of human history.

1. Maqqari: vol. 1, p. 2 29; Ibn-ush-Shabat: p. 16 2.

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APPENDIX B

SPANISH AND ARABIC PLACE NAMES

Alava	اليه	Avignon	اَنبِيُون
Albacete	اَلبِيَط	Badajoz	بَطَلْيُوس
Alcala de Henares	قَلعَةُ النَهَر	Barbate	بَربَاط
Algarve	اَلغَرب	Barcelona	بَرشَلُونَة
Algeciras	اَلجَزِيرَةُ الخَضرَاء	Beja	بَاجَة
Alicante	لِقَنت	Biscay	بَسكُونِيَة
Almeria	اَلمَرِيَّة	Burgos	بَرغَش
Almodovar	اَلمُدَوَّر	Cadiz	قَادِس
Alpuxarras	اَلبَشَرَات	Calatayud	قَلعَةُ اَيُّوب
Amaya	اَمَايَا	Carcassone	قَرقَشُونَة
Aquitaine	اَلُوبِتين	Carmona	قَرمُونِيَة
Aragon	اَرغُون	Carthage	قَرطَاجَنَةُ القَدِيمَة
Archidona	اَرجِذُونَة	Cartagena	قَرطَاجَنَةُ الاَندَلُس
Astorga	اَستُرقَة	Castile	قَشطَالَة
Asturias	اَشتُورِيش	Catalavera	قَطَلِيرَة

Catalonia	قَطَلُونِيَة	Guardarrama	وَادِي الرَّمْلَة
Ceuta	سَبْتَة	Guadina R.	وَادِي آنَة
Cintra	شَنْتَرَة	Guadix	وَادِي آش
Coimbra	قُلُمْرِيَة	Guadalazate	وَادِي سَلِيط
Cordoba	قُرْطُبَة	Huelva	لَبَّة
Cuenca	قُونْكَة	Huesca	اَشْقة
Denia	دَانِيَة	Jaen	جَيَّان
Duero R.	دُوَيْرة	Jativa	شَاطِبَة
Ebro R.	اِبْرَة	Jerez	شَرِيش
Ecija	اِسْتِجَة	Leon	لِيُون
Elvira	اِلْبِيرَة	Lerida	لَارِدَة
Galicia	جَلِّيقِية	Lisbon	اُشْبُونَة
Gaul	غالِس	Loja	لَوشَة
Genil R.	سَنْجِيل	Lorca	لُورقَة
Gerona	جِيرَنْدَة	Lugo	لُك
Gibraltar	جَبَل طَارِق	Lusitania	البرتُغَال القَدِيمَة
Granada	غَرْنَاطَة	Lyon	لُوذُون
Guadaira	وَادِي اِيرَة	Madrid	مَجْرِيط
Guadajoz	وَادِي شُوش	Malaga	مَالِقَة
Guadalajar	وَادِي الحِجَارة	Medinaceli	مَدِينَة سَالِم
Guadina R.	وَادِي لَكَّة	Medina Sidonia	شَذُونَة
Garadalquivir	وَادِي الكَبِير	Merida	مَارِدَة

Mertola	مَارْتُلَة	Segovia	شَقُوبِيَة
Moron	مَوْرُور	Seville	اِشْبِيلِيَة
Murcia	مُرْسِيَة	Sierra Morena	جَبَل الشَّارَات
Narbonne	اَرْبُونَة	Sierra Nevada	جَبَل شُلَير
Niebla	لَبْلَة	Silves	شِلب
Ocsonoba	اَكْشُونِيَة	Tagus R.	تَاجَة
Orihuela	اُرِيُولَة	Talavera	طَلَبِيرة
Oviedo	اُوبِيَادة	Tarragona	طَرَّكُونَة
Pamplona	بَنْبَلُونَة	Toledo	طُلَيْطِلَة
Pyrenees	بَرْنِيَة	Tortosa	طَرْطُوشَة
Rejio	رَيَّة	Toulouse	تُولُوشَة
Rhone R.	رَذُونَة	Trafalgar	طَرَفُ الاَغَر
Rhonda	رُنْدَة	Tudela	تُطِيلَة
Salamanca	طَلَمَنْكَة	Valencia	بَلَنْسِيَة
Santa Maria	شَنْتَمَرِيَة	Valladolid	بَلَدُ الوَلِيد
Santarem	شَنْتَرِين	Valmusa	فَجّ مُوسَى
Santiago	شَنْت يَاقُوب	Villabaruz	بَارُو
Saragosa	سَرَقُسْطَة	Viseu	بَازُو
Secunda	شَقُنْدَ	Zamora	سَمُورَة